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Policy and Passion A Novel of Australian Life

Rosa Campbell Praed

POLICY AND PASSION.

A Novel of Australian Life.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

IN placing before the English public a novel dealing exclusively with Australian life, a few prefatory remarks may not be inapplicable.

That the mother country should be comparatively unacquainted with the features and characteristics, the inner workings, the social interests, and great and petty political aspirations of this most promising of her offspring, is a fact principally to be attributed to the onesidedness of the intellectual intercourse which at present connects Great Britain with the Antipodes.

By means of books, more especially con-

temporary fiction, the Australian of the second generation may render himself familiar with most phases of British society. On the other hand, the Englishman desirous of penetrating to the hidden sources of thought and action which govern the lives of his colonial brethren, though he has to acknowledge deep obligations to several influential English writers and to a smaller number of Antipodean authors, must deplore the limited medium of communion offered to his imagination by the literature emanating directly from Australia.

It can be no matter for conjecture that when in the course of years Australia shall have appropriated to herself an independent position among those occupied by more ancient nations, and shall have formulated a social and political system adapted to the conditions of her development and growth, she will possess a literature of her own as power-

ful and original as might be prognosticated, from the influences of nature and civilisation brought to bear upon the formation of a distinct national type.

But the time for this is hardly yet ripe.

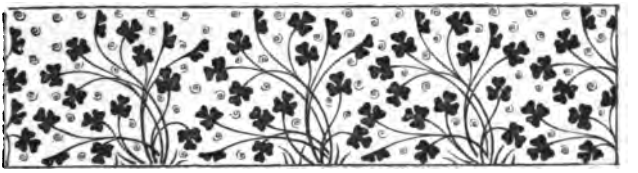
Yet, the fluttering heart-beats and spasmodic efforts; the struggles after a dimly recognised good, and the many failures of achievement; the conflict of personal and patriotic ambition; the imperfect assimilation of traditional ideas with unconventional circumstances; the contrast between human passion unsoftened by the veil of refinement with which civilisation drapes that which is foul, and of rudely-expressed yearnings after the nobler motives of existence—all these contending elements which go far towards making up the sum of young life in the individual or the race, appeal with pathos and peculiar interest to the parent nature which has given them birth.

It has been my wish to depict in these pages certain phases of Australian life, in which the main interests and dominant passions of the personages concerned are identical with those which might readily present themselves upon an European stage, but which, directly and indirectly, are influenced by striking natural surroundings, and by the conditions of being, inseparable from the youth of a vigorous and impulsive nation.

The scenery described here is drawn directly from nature; and the name of Leichardt's Land—a tribute to the memory of a daring but ill-fated explorer—is but a transparent mask covering features that will be familiar to many of my Australian readers.

But it is to the British public that I, an Australian, address myself, with the hope that I may in some slight degree aid in bridging over the gulf which divides the Old World from the Young.

R. M. PRAED.



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POLICY AND PASSION.

CHAPTER I.

AT BRAYSHER'S INN.

BRAYSHER'S, the chief inn at Kooya, was a one-storied, wooden building, placed at the junction of the two principal streets of the township. A wide verandah, enclosed by dingy railings which had been originally painted green, and filled with squatters' chairs and small wooden tables, extended round the two visible sides of the hotel. A bar, much frequented by the roughs who came down from the bush 'for a

spree,' faced one of the streets, and a coffee-room, which served as a rendezvous for the passengers by Cobb's coach to and from Leichardt's Town, and opened by glass doors on to the verandah, fronted the other thoroughfare,

It wanted now about an hour to the time at which the coach usually started, and the vehicle, ready to be horsed, was drawn up beside the sign-post. It was a clumsy affair, painted red and yellow. A wooden framework supported an awning, of which the leather curtains might be pulled up or down at will; in front there was a high driver's box; two wooden benches faced each other behind, and at the extreme end was a third, only to be approached by a scramble over the backs of the others. The coach was generally drawn by five horses.

The time was half-past four in the afternoon of a sultry day in February. A storm brooded in the distance, and there was an

ominous stillness in the atmosphere. The oleanders and loquat-trees before the opposite houses looked brown and thirsty. The acacias in the inn garden drooped with sickly languor; and the spiky crowns of the golden pine-apples beneath them were thickly coated with dust. Flaming hibiscus flowers stared at the beholder in a hot, aggressive fashion. There was no green shadow anywhere to afford relief to eyes wearied with brightness and colour. Brassy clouds were gathering slowly in the west, and the sun, beating pitilessly upon the zinc roofs of the verandahs, was mercilessly refracted from the glaring limestone hills that formed the eastern border of the township.

Two long roads intersected each other at the inn corner. One stretched away into the bush, where it wound among gaunt gum-trees, and lost itself in the dull herbage with which the country was overgrown; the other seemed to terminate abruptly upon the sum-

mit of a chalky ridge, where a clump of grass trees, with their brown, spear-like tufts erect, looked like sentinels to the barren scene.

Wooden-porticoed shanties, alternating at intervals with brick public offices; newly-painted stores, which displayed all varieties of wares; and gaudy public-houses, round which clustered brawny, sunburnt navvies, lined, but did not shade, the streets. The general air of the place was one of inaction. Sometimes a bullock-dray, piled with bales of wool or station stores, would rumble by; or a covered cart, driven by a weather-beaten German woman from some neighbouring selection, would pause for a moment in front of Braysher's, while its owner interchanged a few words with some acquaintance lounging at the bar.

More frequently a bushman, in Crimean shirt and moleskins, with his coat strapped before him, would clatter over the stony road

and dismount before the inn. First, he would unsaddle his horse, hanging its bridle on to the railings of the verandah, while the animal, accustomed to the habits of the place, would find its own way to the water-trough. Next, the new-comer would don his coat, and sidle across to the post-office opposite, whence he would shortly return, laden with letters and newspapers, which he would place upon the arm of a squatter's chair in readiness for inspection. Then, after carefully choosing the shadiest side of the verandah, he would stretch his legs at full length, dangle his feet over the railings, call for a glass of grog to wash the dust out of his throat, thereby intensifying the redness of a sun-baked face, and would finally set himself to the perusal of his correspondence.

Many bushmen had arrived at Braysher's that afternoon, and all had gone through exactly the same formula, with the occasional

addition of a greeting to one or other of those already assembled on the inn verandah.

'Good-day to you;' 'Steaming hot;' 'Looks like a storm brewing;' 'Very dry up country;' 'Fine weather this for the cotton-growers;' and such-like interjectional remarks sounded unfamiliarly in the ears of an English gentleman but lately arrived in Australia, who was leaning against one of the verandah-posts, contemplating with languid interest the scene around him.

He was smoking, and apart from his air and physique, the silver-mounted match-box in his hand and the perfume of his expensive cigar sufficiently indicated him to the intelligence of the bushmen as 'a chap from the old country.' Nevertheless, his tall, broadly-built figure, bronzed, high-bred face, and soldier-like bearing, had no generic affinity with the lank limbs, the fresh-coloured, supine features, and frank gullibility of the

typical *new chum.* The boldest *old hand* would hardly have attempted to play a practical joke upon Hardress Barrington.

He looked about thirty-five. The upper part of his face was fine, with a touch of nobility in the high forehead, broad at its base, but slightly receding at the crown. The dark brown hair fringed off in little rings from the temples. The brows were strongly marked and wrinkled together in a frown, which deepened the indentures of the sockets, and gave to the grey eyes a remarkable intensity of expression. The nose was straight, with a somewhat coarse conformation of nostril, and had on each side a deep line extending below the upper lip. The mouth was concealed by a heavy moustache, and the clean-shaven, slightly prominent chin was cleft in the centre. A handsome man, upon whom it would be impossible for the stranger not to bestow several glances of interest, and of whom it might be safely surmised that he had

travelled much and had come into contact with various grades of society.

'I suppose that Cobb's coach is on its last legs now,' said one of the squatters, relighting a short black pipe that had expired between his lips. 'I shouldn't wonder if we had steam-carriages to Leichardt's Town before December year. Do you think that Longleat will carry his railway bill this session?'

'There'll be a stiff fight over the Speech,' said a red-faced bushman, in a cabbage-tree hat, laying down the *Leichardt's Town Chronicle*, which he had been diligently perusing. 'Middleton has been blowing no end, up north; and there are some snug berths to be given away. Folks must have an eye to their own pockets; and for all the blather that people talk about impartiality, there's no doubt that bribery tells in the long run.'

'I'll back Longleat,' said another, 'He is the devil for sticking to his purpose. He said he'd make the colony, and he is going

the right way to work. What Leichardt's Land wants is money, and money means Immigration and Public Works. Hullo, Tom Dungie! Down from the Koorong, eh? Why, you've given the little piebald a sore back with your hard riding.'

Tom Dungie, the mail-man, who had halted at the post-office across the street, had just removed his saddle with its load of brown leather post-bags, and was ruefully regarding a puffy spot above the loin, which threatened unpleasant consequences to a dearly-loved pony. Two other horses which he had been driving, one of which bore a pair of empty saddle-bags, were browsing by the wayside. Dungie was a tiny fat man, with small, twinkling grey eyes, a round face, and a whining voice.

'It's from all the lies I'm a-carryin',' he squeaked. 'The little piebald, she's a righteous 'oss; and Lord! them Parliamentary rigmaroles—there's seven of 'em in blue en-

velopes from Kooralbyn—do hact like a James's blister upon a sensitive back.'

A shout of laughter greeted Tom Dungie's explanation; but he maintained an imperturbable gravity during the explosion.

'Who's the hack for?' inquired one of the dwellers at Braysher's.

'It's that there lord at Dyraaba as has a new chum agoin' in for colonial experience,' squeaked Dungie, giving each of the supernumerary beasts a sharp smack on the wither. 'I say, Mr. Braysher, put the 'acks up, and don't let 'em be turned out for any of your swell customers. My word! it's awful dry to-day—Longleat's on the road behind.'

'Longleat!' shouted a group of men at the bar; and soon the cry spread through the township. Even the children playing at fives with the pebbles in the road caught it up, and their mothers rushed out to join in the excitement. Before many minutes a small crowd had assembled in front of Braysher's.

'Who is Longleat?' asked the Englishman.

'Longleat!' echoed a hirsute squatter, who expectorated freely, and frankly owned to American origin. 'Longleat!' he repeated, not looking at his questioner, but gazing over the heads of the crowd into the vista of houses and distant trees. 'Wal! it's my opeenion, sir, that it 'ud be worth your while to study up the politics of this 'ere rising colony, ef it's only to become acquainted with the career of Thomas Longleat, of Kooralbyn —a *re*markable man, sir. The Champion of the working class; the Pillar of Progress; and the Enemy of a *ty*rannical and parsimonious democracy.'

The speaker drawled out with lagging eloquence his emphasised adjectives, hitched up his trousers, and slouched to the other end of the verandah, his eyes still fixed upon the distant object of his attention, which was rapidly resolving itself into a flying speck

advancing mid a cloud of freshly-raised dust.

'But who *is* Longleat?' inquired Barrington again.

'Member for Kooya, and Premier of Leichardt's Land,' replied a spry little stockman in moleskins.

'Thank you,' said Barrington.

'A *re*markable specimen, sir, of the *vi*cissitudes of Australia,' said the first speaker, returning to his former position against the verandah-rails. 'It's a known fact that Thomas Longleat began life in this colony as a bullock-driver. He ain't ashamed to own up to it. A bullock-driver on these very roads that he is spanking over now with the finest team in Leichardt's Land. A man as yoked his own beasts, and spread his tarpaulin, and chewed his quid of tobacco when the day's work was over; and now, why if he floats his Railway Loan, her Majesty will make him a Knight of St. Michael and St.

George, as sure as we're standing in Braysher's verandah. Here he comes.'

A buggy, drawn by four steaming chestnuts, rattled down the road, and was pulled up in front of the hotel. A stout red-faced gentleman with a swelling chest and commanding presence, clad in white linen clothes, and wearing a broad-brimmed puggareed hat, descended from the vehicle. He was followed by a wizened-up little man, with very thin legs and a hooked nose, whose ferret-like face was fringed by a border of iron-grey hair, and wore an unpleasant, saturnine expression.

The mob set up a cheer, which Longleat acknowledged by a good-humoured salutation, while his voice, sonorous but unrefined, sounded clearly above the uproar, as he addressed the innkeeper.

'Hi, Braysher! Good-day to you. I am going to Leichardt's Town by the coach to-night; but Mr. Ferris will be stopping here

for a day or so. Look after my horses, will you? Have you got four stalls empty?'

The innkeeper advanced and touched his hat, a mark of deference he had not shown to any of the previous arrivals.

'Well, sir, we're pretty full, but we'll manage. There's Dungie brought down two hacks for that there lord up your way; but they can go off to the paddock, and we'll make room somehow for your team.'

Mr. Longleat smiled, tickled and somewhat flattered by the evident fact, that 'that there lord' was in Braysher's estimation of very small importance compared with himself.

He shook hands with some of the men in the verandah, called for a tumbler of cold water which he drank standing, and said in a patronising tone to his companion, who had ordered a glass of brandy in the coffee-room:

'A bad thing, Ferris. Stick to Adam's ale in a hot climate. Temperance and success,

that's been my motto, and I've got no cause to complain of the way I've got on in life.'

Mr. Ferris retreated scowling to partake of his refreshment; and the premier, after throwing a 'chaffing' word to Dungie, who was inclined to resent the summary expulsion of his horses, turned his eyes upon Barrington. He stared at the Englishman with a half-angry curiosity, as though he recognised in him the representative of an order for which he had no liking.

CHAPTER II.

THE PREMIER.

THE mob round the hotel had thickened fast, and as the premier stood in Braysher's verandah surveying the crowded street, the rowdies set up a series of shouts.

'Hooray for Thomas Longleat! Go it, old chap, for the Railway; pitch into the obstructionist crew! Down with Middleton and his sneaking northerners!' concluding with an unanimous cry, 'I say, Longleat, give us a bit of talk. Open your jaw while you're waiting and let 'em have it hot.'

The Premier shook his head, half deprecating, half acknowledging his popularity with the Kooya mob, now considerably augmented by a band of idle navvies in blue shirts and felt caps, to whom the cry of 'the railway' was the herald of a new era of pay and plenty.

'We don't mean to let you clear out in this 'ere —— coach till you've told us what's agoin to become of *us* when Parliament meets,' cried one of these insistents, perching himself upon a wheel of Cobb's.

'We aren't the sort of chaps to be put off any longer with these ere screws,' shrieked another rough, who had clambered to the box-seat. 'It's steam 'osses that suits our money. Hooray for Longleat's railway! Come, go it, old chap! Tell us that you hain't got no intention of caving in to them stingy oppositionists.'

The Premier came forward to the edge of the verandah, and took off his hat. As he stood in the glare of the declining sun, his

head thrown back, his big chest expanded, with his broad capable forehead, his keen eyes looking out steadily from under shaggy brows, his under lip slightly protruding and giving to his coarsely-moulded face an expression of suave self-complacency, in spite of the drawbacks of evident low birth and vulgar assertiveness, there were in his bearing and features indications of intellectual power and iron resolution, which would have impressed a higher-class mob than that now waiting eagerly for his words. His brawny hands, rough still with the traces of work and exposure, grasped the verandah rails, while he began to speak in an easy conversational style, unembellished by any flowers of oratory.

'Electors and friends,' said Mr. Longleat, 'you've asked me to make you a speech before I travel down to Leichardt's Town, in Cobb's coach yonder; and I dare say you would all cheer me as loudly as your lungs

would let you, if I just took that vehicle for my text in a tirade against the petty jealousy of northern politicians, who grudge to the populated south a means of locomotion of which there ain't enough of squatters, let alone free selectors, to make any use up there. But it's not my way to abuse the bridge that has carried me over, and I won't cry down Cobb's coach, that, scores of times when I have been driving hard all day from Kooralbyn, has saved my horses' legs and my own temper. You can't have railways at a moment's notice, my men; and it's not so very long ago that we all thought it a fine and wonderful thing to have any sort of a public conveyance between Leichardt's Town and Kooya. It's a nice, roomy, well-built vehicle, and has done its work well; and I mean no disrespect to Mr. Cobb when I say to you here that I hope, before two years are out, to travel from this town to the metropolis in one that'll be easier about the

springs, and more commodious for the carriage of our wool and cotton to port, and our meat and vegetables to market.

'I have driven fifty miles to-day, along a roughish bit of country, and am not much inclined for public speaking; but since you want to know what my policy is going to be this coming session, I'll tell you. I'm going to fight might and main for your railway; and if the public feeling is what I take it to be, there's not much doubt but that you'll have it. Not because you want it. I do the best I can for my constituency, but I bear in mind that Kooya is not the only electorate in Leichardt's Land. It's because our colony requires the fresh impetus which she will receive from the circulation of new monies, that I'm going to move heaven and earth to float the Loan which I shall bring before Parliament at the opening of the session.

'There are folks up north, and down south too, that say the Ministry will knock under,

and that when Parliament meets the railway question will be shuffled over, and the Opposition conciliated, because Thomas Longleat likes power and place, and means to stick to his seat in the Treasury. Now, I say that's a lie! Thomas Longleat never knocked under in his life, and he's not going to be trodden on now. If he is thrashed, and the country goes agen him, he'll take his licking and bide his time; but if he knows that the country is with him, he'll fight for her while he has got a voice to speak with and a leg to stand on. The Railway Loan will be the party question of this session, and upon it my Government stands or falls. You all know me here; it's my way to carry through what I've set my mind on. It's my determination —some call it luck and some call it obstinacy—that's got me on in life. I ain't ashamed to tell you that I began in Leichardt's Land bullock-driving along this very road I'm going over to-night. I was a

rough sort of chap in those days, my friends, but I'd got the *will* in me strong even then. I said to myself, "I'll rise," and I have risen. I've climbed inch by inch, step by step, till I'm nigh the topmost bough of the tree; and I'm proud of what I've done. It's Leichardt's Land that has made me; and when I see my benefactress low and sinking, it's not surprising that I want mine to be the hand to lift her up again. We are watching a critical point in her history. Nations have their turning-points, their times of weakness and depression, the same as human beings. Leichardt's Land is like a sick person whose powers have been enfeebled, and whose glorious capabilities have been contracted by years of parsimonious neglect. She needs a fillip. You have heard of a wonderful operation called transfusion, by which fresh vitalising blood is sent coursing through languid veins, and a new impetus is given to the springs of life. It is the transfusion of money,

the blood of nations, that Leichardt's Land requires to make her flush and strong.

'Let a temporary loan, which will, ere long, repay itself fourfold, be poured into her treasury, and we shall see, in a short space of time, railways penetrating to the very heart of her rich pastures; bridges spanning her rivers; her mines yielding gold and jewels, her plantations sugar and cotton; the European market supplied with her wool, and the colonial market with her produce. My friends, the Loan Bill which will come before the House immediately, is not a mere question of internecine jealousy and party rancour, but of the introduction of new life and vigour into a glorious but debilitated colony!'

Longleat, as he concluded his peroration, his rough eloquence kindling as he opened upon his subject, stood for a moment, his shoulders thrown back, his face bland, his under lip projecting, ere he proceeded with his address.

But at this moment the coach-horses, ready harnessed, were brought round from the inn-yard, and there arose some little confusion amidst the crowd in the street; while the sound of a woman's cry arrested any further words with which Mr. Longleat might have intended to occupy the five minutes which must elapse before the starting of the coach.

A lady dressed in black, slight and delicate-looking, had been pushed somewhat violently against one of the posts of Braysher's verandah. She was evidently a passenger by Cobb's to Leichardt's Town, and being alone, and naturally alarmed at finding herself in the centre of a political demonstration, was making for the shelter of the hotel.

The Premier, attracted by the cry, glanced downwards from his raised position, and met the appealing gaze of a pair of dark eyes which he knew well. With more agility than might have been expected, judging by his

age and figure, he vaulted the railings, and in a moment was at the lady's side.

'Mrs. Vallancy!' he exclaimed. 'How is it that you are here?'

She grasped his arm, and her eyes beamed with gratitude upon his face.

'I have been staying with the Ansons, at Cooranga. Mr. Anson brought me down, but could not wait to see me off in the coach. I am going to Leichardt's Town this evening.'

'So am I. I shall be able to look after you. You've been knocked agen the railings. I hope you are not hurt?'

'No; it was a mere nothing. I am not hurt—only a little frightened, but quite happy now that you are here. I am glad that I have heard you speak in this way. It impresses one in a different manner to the dull debates which one listens to from the Ladies' Gallery. And, you know,' she added in a lower tone, 'I make rather a merit of not

taking any great interest in politics; it would not do for me to side openly against my husband, whatever I might think and wish in private.'

Mr. Longleat pressed his companion's hand, appreciating her delicacy at its very highest pitch. A man of coarse fibre is apt to attribute ultra-refinement to a woman by whom he is attracted.

Mr. Vallancy was a member of the Legislative Council. Though notoriously needy, and desirous of a Government appointment, he belonged to the Middleton faction, and had made himself peculiarly obnoxious to the reigning Ministry. The Premier had become acquainted with Mrs. Vallancy a short time before the present date; and notwithstanding the inimical attitude of her husband, certain casual meetings and suggestive conversations had deepened a budding interest into something more than commonplace social intimacy.

'I am sorry that you should have been annoyed by the crowd. I—they insisted upon my speaking—upon my word I could not have got out of it. I wish I had known that you were to be here.'

He spoke with a nervous utterance that, except in the presence of ladies, was unusual to him.

'Ah!' said Mrs. Vallancy in a tone half-melancholy, half-arch, 'I know that you are the idol of the mob; such popularity must be very delightful. I sincerely hope that you will carry your Railway Bill. I had never before connected it so personally with you. Party questions have been sources of annoyance to me. This one will possess a more agreeable interest.'

They had stepped on to the verandah, and Mr. Longleat placed one of the canvas chairs for his companion to sit upon. All the men turned to look at her, but not one, except Barrington, took his pipe from his lips.

Though she was perfectly aware of the attention she excited, she did not appear to be embarrassed by it. Her hat had been tilted back by the push she had sustained, and her low brow and fine eyes were fully visible. The latter were black, slightly prominent, and restless and dissatisfied in expression; her mouth, a curved red line, was more characteristic than sweet; her colouring was clear and pale: her voice low and remarkably distinct.

The nervous excitability and sensitive refinement which her face and manner suggested, were quite calculated to impress such a temperament as that of Mr. Longleat; but although his admiration was obvious, it was evident that he had not acquired perfect ease in her society. In spite of the feminine experience implied by two matrimonial bereavements, and the bringing up of a daughter, companionship with women of a particular calibre gave him an uncomfortable sense of inferiority, and made him conscious of certain

lapses in grammar, and faults in pronunciation, which considerable proficiency as a public speaker and years of unwearied self-education had not enabled him entirely to surmount.

'Is Miss Longleat with you?' inquired Mrs. Vallancy.

'No,' he replied. 'She is at Kooralbyn.'

'I am longing to see her again. Some friends of mine who met her in Sydney last winter wrote to me in raptures about her beauty. Is she as lovely as ever?'

Mr. Longleat smiled, and elevated his head with an air of gratified pride.

'Yes,' he said, 'I think she is handsomer now than I've ever seen her. She took her place in Sydney amongst the best of 'em.'

As he spoke he caught Mr. Barrington's eye, and scowled with incipient dislike. Though Mrs. Vallancy was sitting a little apart from the other loungers in the verandah, Barrington was sufficiently near to have overheard her remark and the Premier's reply.

An expression of amusement passed over the Englishman's face, as he mentally pictured a coarse, gaudily-dressed Antipodean belle, whose every gesture would inevitably offend against his refined European taste. His supercilious smile incensed Mr. Longleat still more deeply, and as Barrington turned away he asked angrily :

'Who is that man ?'

'He is evidently a stranger,' said Mrs. Vallancy.

'A new chum going up to Lord Dolph's,' explained one of the bushmen.

'I could have sworn that he was one of those cursed English swells,' muttered Longleat; 'we don't want that brood out here. I'm pretty quick at guessing what a man is made of, and my first impressions don't often deceive me. It's instinct; and somehow I don't cotton up to Lord Dolph's new chum.'

The horses had by this time been put to the coach, and the driver, with the reins in

his hand, was calling his passengers to mount.

Mr. Longleat helped Mrs. Vallancy to ascend, and took his place beside her in the back bench unoccupied by anyone else.

'The box-seat has been reserved for you, sir,' said the driver.

'Never mind,' answered Longleat. 'I've got a lady to look after. I'll sit here.'

Mrs. Vallancy cast upon him a look of ineffable gratitude; the other travellers clambered up; the coachman flicked his whip upon the horses' backs, and the lumbering vehicle clattered off mid the shouts of the rapidly-dispersing mob.

'Hooray for the Premier! Longleat and his railway for ever.'

CHAPTER III.

THE PREMIER'S STOREKEEPER.

BARRINGTON stood on the verandah of the inn and watched the coach till it was out of sight. Mr. Ferris, who had now emerged from the coffee-room, stole softly to the railings and sidled towards the Englishman, casting at the stranger furtive glances from his keen, grey eyes, while with one lean hand he stroked his grizzled beard.

The sun was setting behind a range of distant hills. Storm-clouds were still threatening, and the deepening dusk had mellowed the glaring white of the limestone ridges into

neutral grey, and had subdued into harmony the hard outlines and ungraceful colouring of the wooden and brick erections upon each side of the street.

'Not much of a view,' said Mr. Ferris, looking up in a bird-like way into Barrington's face; 'but picturesque in a manner of its own.'

'I suppose that one admires the landscape because it is unlike those with which one is familiar,' replied Barrington.

'European travellers say,' continued Mr. Ferris, 'that there are no striking features in Australian scenery. Bah! they cry—the eye wearies of endless gum-trees. But that is a mistake. Those who speak so have not penetrated into the heart of the country. Ah! we have mountains in the Koorong district, sublime with a wild grandeur that I have never seen equalled. It is nature—nature only which reconciles me to my exile.'

'You call your life here exile,' said Barrington. 'I presume that you are English? Have you lived for long in Australia?'

'Nine years,' replied Mr. Ferris. 'No,' he added, correcting himself, 'it will be ten next September. I find it difficult to calculate the course of time when the months are all alike, and when they are passed in forests and not in cities.'

'Yet to you, a lover of natural beauty, this ought not to be a hardship.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Ferris, with a grandiloquent air, 'I have my theories. Let the young seek inspiration in the woods, the aged in the breath of towns. There is a close link between nature and humanity. To glorify the one necessitates sympathy with the other. A poet pent up for life upon the fairest desert island would produce few stanzas worthy of immortality.'

'You mean,' said Barrington, 'that the ideal must be yoked to the practical, or in-

spiration becomes bathos. You yourself are an artist, perhaps ?'

'I have indeed known the flutterings of enthusiasm, and have tasted the bitterness of unappreciated effort,' said Mr. Ferris in a joyless, piping tone, with his eyes fixed upon the wooden verandah-post in mournful abstraction from his surroundings. 'Aspiration has been the keynote of my life. Failure, its refrain.'

'That is a melancholy experience,' said Barrington in a sympathetic manner.

'How many are dowered with the yearnings of genius, and cursed with executive inability!' cried Mr. Ferris almost fiercely. 'How many have lived too soon or too late! In how many has the divine fire been almost quenched in youth, and has emitted but a feeble flame in old age! But why do I talk of myself?' he added with a sudden deprecatory gesture. 'It is a morbid egotism that seeks vent in self-revelation to a passing stranger.

Leichardt's Land only sees in me the shadow of her Premier's greatness. Anthony Ferris, sir, at your service. Thomas Longleat's accountant, store-manager, indoor man of all work at Kooralbyn.' He waited a moment, then said: 'I glean that you are a new arrival in Australia, but I have not heard your name.'

'Barrington,' replied the Englishman, shortly.

'I knew a man of that name,' said Mr. Ferris in a tone of dismal retrospect, 'a long time ago—he was a friend of Edmund Kean. Poor Kean! He used to say, "If I had Barrington always with me, I should never go wrong!" Did you ever see Kean, sir?' he added with sharp enthusiasm. 'Ah! that was an actor! Such fire! such wit! I never knew Shakespeare till I knew Edmund Kean.'

'He was rather before my time,' said Barrington.

'True; you are a considerably younger man than I. But I have seen others more nearly your contemporaries. Macready—he was statuesque, and had studied—Charles Young, Kemble. I could criticise these, but Kean deprived me of the power of judgment. Shall I ever forget that slender man of diminutive stature, and finely-chiselled features, whose piercing orbs held the spectator spellbound while he spoke. I saw him last in "The Merchant of Venice"—"*Signor Antonio* . . . . "' quoted Mr. Ferris, in a low intense voice, with deep, dramatic intonation; then after repeating a few lines, he suffered his head to droop dejectedly upon his breast. 'I cannot do it,' he said; 'the manner has passed from me. I'm getting old, and I forget . . . You saw Longleat just now?'

'Yes,' replied Barrington, 'I was interested, amused, by the excitement his arrival created.'

'People call him my patron. Thomas

Longleat patron to *me!* There is a man who not many years ago was absolutely uneducated. *I* taught him all that he knows of the classics. *I* corrected his maiden speech in the Assembly, and now he jeers at me for a fool. It is such a man as that who succeeds in Australia. May I ask whether you are visiting the Antipodes from mere curiosity, or whether you have thoughts of becoming a cattle farmer?'

'I shall remain in Australia, if the life suits me,' replied Barrington.

'It will not. Settle your mind at once upon that score. You will be miserable, whether you make money or lose what you have. By-and-by you will acknowledge that I am a true prophet. To the refined Englishman, reared mid the associations of art, literature, music, the drama—accustomed to European luxury, and the charm of congenial society—Australia, if not a hell of discontent, must be a sink of degradation.'

'You speak strongly,' said Barrington, 'and certainly not encouragingly; but I imagine that a man of moderate calibre would be content to exist in a country which afforded him the opportunity for becoming wealthy.'

'Wealthy—yah!' snarled Anthony Ferris, in a manner indescribable upon paper. 'Money is, after all, but money's worth. For instance, what sort of occupation can there be to a man like me, in weighing sacks of flour, chronicling pounds of beef, and calculating roods of fencing? Is it not a suffocating, degrading slavery? And such, to you, will be the disgusting routine of station-life. Stock-riding or shepherding, branding or shearing, buying and selling, weariness of body and slow atrophy of intellect. You are not young enough to anticipate compensating wealth; when, if it comes, you will have lost the capacity for enjoyment. Excuse my curiosity—are you married?'

'No,' replied Barrington.

'You will then lack the incentive of working for a beloved object, which sweetens toil to me. I dare say that the uneducated would consider my lot enviable. I have abundance to eat and drink—a comfortable house to live in; I am putting by for the benefit of my child'—Ferris's face softened curiously—'nevertheless, you see before you a disappointed man.'

'May I ask in what particular line you were unsuccessful?' asked Barrington.

'There was none. My ambition was boundless; it embraced every phase of art. Vague aspiration has been my curse. I had not courage or patience to continue struggling against fate. Had I possessed Longleat's insensitive nature I might have succeeded.'

'Mr. Longleat is also English by birth?' asked Barrington, curiously.

'An odd, malignant smile passed over Mr. Ferris's face.

'Yes, English by birth, certainly. Good-

afternoon, Tom Dungie,' he added, addressing the mailman, who had approached the verandah-railing. 'What is the news up Dyraaba way?'

'It's you that ought to tell us the news, Mr. Ferris,' said Dungie. 'Folks say that Dyson Maddox is to be the new Minister for Lands, and that he is to marry Miss Longleat. Is it true, do you think, sir?'

'It's not unlikely,' said Mr. Ferris. 'Miss Longleat is a lady of caprices. She may be seized with the caprice for matrimony. I dare say, I dare say; and I wish it might be true; but *I* have not been informed upon the subject.'

'Well,' squeaked Dungie, in his nasal tones, 'I'm sure I wish Mr. Maddox joy of his bargain. She's a handsome young woman; and if she's got nought else, she's got brass. They do say as she is rare winnin'. Gells with tin-mines at their backs don't grow like wild cherries, with the stones outside ready

to be picked for the stretching.' Tom Dungie always chuckled audibly after uttering what he considered a sharp speech. 'Folks tell,' he whispered mysteriously, 'that the young woman with the black eyes—her that sat beside the Premier on the coach—is a rum sort, and that he has got pretty thick with her lately. Do you think he's hit?'

'That's a married woman,' said Mr. Ferris; 'her husband is in the Council.'

'Marriage ain't no security,' remarked Dungie, reflectively. 'I've heard said that 'twur like drinking a glass of doctored grog: directly you've swallowed one, yer mouth begins to parch for another—and that's the way with women of a sort; there's some of 'em as can't do without men. She warn't nought to look at, though: it's colour as takes me; but a man mostly fancies his opposite, and Longleat has got enough red for two. I wur told to look out for a gentleman from England,' added Dungie, making a lurch in

Barrington's direction. 'The lord at Dyraaba sent a 'ack down and a pack 'oss for the swag. I said as I'd show the gentleman the short cut, which is pretty stiff for a new chum.'

'Do you mean Lord Adolphus Bassett?' asked Barrington.

'Oh! that's his name, is it? Some folks calls him Mr. Bassett, and some Mr. Dolph, and other folks Lord Dolph. I never knowed rightly which it wur, and it ain't of much odds.'

'I knew him in England,' said Barrington, 'and I'm going to stay with him now. Does he live far from here?'

'Nigh upon forty mile. I shall start at daybreak with my mails. Can you ride, sir?'

'Yes,' answered Barrington, laughing.

'I asked because new chums don't, mostly. Didn't know whether you'd be able to keep up with the little piebald. She's a rare un to go, she is. That there lord ain't much of

a hand with a buck-jumper, but my lady, lor! she can sit like Old Nick. Well, you'll hear me calling in the morning,' added Dungie, affably; and with another bow, which was accomplished by laying his hands upon the pit of his stomach, and bending forward as far as the laws of balance would permit, he walked away.

Presently a bell rang in the coffee-room, and all who had remained in the hotel flocked in to a somewhat nondescript evening meal. There was a smoking joint at one end of the table, a tin teapot at the other, and bread, butter and vegetables were placed promiscuously down the sides. Two women, who were respectively Mrs. Braysher and her maid-of-all-work, waited.

The bushmen — rough specimens of humanity—congregated together. Barrington and Mr. Ferris took their seats a little apart from the rest of the company. There was very little conversation while the meal was in

progress. The men were hungry, and plied their knives and forks vigorously, washing down the tough beef and hard bread with copious draughts of tea. Mr. Ferris, who had taken his stimulant beforehand, likewise drank tea. Barrington called for a pint of sherry, and was brought a muddy decoction, which he tasted, made a wry face, and set down.

'Don't drink wine in Australia,' said Mr. Ferris; 'it is bad. Take to spirits; that is the way with most Englishmen. 'You'll start with theories about colonial wine. I did; but, like me, you'll find that they are a delusion. There is a good wine made in the south; but till the intercolonial duty is abolished it will never become the national drink. Brandy is cheaper. So we ruin our nervous systems with strong tea, and our digestions by promiscuous nips. You will be asked a dozen times in the day to "come and have a nip;" and if you are weak-minded,

as I am, you'll yield till you find that without a stimulant you are a poor creature. The higher your mental calibre, the more you'll drink. It is Longleat's boast that he is temperate. Yah! a fig for temperance when a man has the frame of a Hercules and the insusceptibility of a bullock-driver! You don't seem to have much appetite. I see that you have been accustomed to a different style of cooking. If you have finished we will sit out in the verandah. There's a storm in the west, but its strength will be spent before it reaches Kooya. The thunder has cooled the air already, and we shall be able to smoke in comparative comfort.'

Mr. Ferris led the way to the verandah, and pulled two arm-chairs to a breezy corner. He then produced his leather tobacco-pouch and a short black pipe, and began to smoke, drawing deep breaths, as though he enjoyed the narcotism, the soft air and the fading light, while every now and then he uttered in

a snarling, neutral tone, some discursive remark upon Australian customs, or sneering allusion to his master. He seemed a man oppressed by an immense burden of discontent.

The verandah was almost empty. Most of the bushmen had taken up their hats and had gone out. There was a circus performing in a neighbouring street, and the attraction, weighed even against the charms of the coffee-room, was too potent to be resisted. Every now and then shrill bursts of laughter, and the braying of musical instruments, sounded through the murky night, of which the darkness was at regular intervals illuminated by flashes of sheet-lightning in the west.

'You have lately come from England,' said Mr. Ferris, edging a little closer to his companion. 'I dare say that you have lived in London, eh?'

'Yes,' said Barrington with a short laugh; 'I'm very well acquainted with London.'

'You've seen the best in the world then. There's no place like London, except perhaps Paris. Lord!' peering with his little grey eyes into Barrington's face, 'that's what I call *life*. Balzac and Paul de Kock, eh? I dare say now that you know all the club gossip and theatrical scandal. I like a spice of the devil; it's piquant, it's refreshing. Now it would interest me to hear who are the newest singers and actors, and the painters who have become famous since I was in England. I might perhaps recognise familiar names. I used to be considered a good critic in my day. At Kooralbyn I have a few gems, slight things, done for me by comparatively insignificant artists, in whom I saw the germs of future eminence. If you are a lover of art, I shall be happy at some time to show you the sketches.'

Barrington thanked the old man, and, humouring his fancy, talked on with the air of one to whom the subject was familiar, of the

latest operas, the last Academy, the newest scandals in the fashionable and artistic world, the gossip of the clubs and theatres, while every now and then Mr. Ferris would interrupt him with some eager question which showed how deeply he was interested.

'And you have left all this!' he exclaimed at length. 'You have deliberately chosen a life of toil and discomfort amidst the wilds of Australia in preference to one of refined enjoyment in England! You surprise me.'

'My visit is only an experiment,' said Barrington; 'I have not yet determined to remain in Australia.'

'Excuse me,' said Mr. Ferris, with hesitating curiosity; 'something in your manner and bearing leads me to suppose that you have been in the army; am I right?'

'I was in the Guards,' replied Barrington, incautiously. A moment later he regretted his want of reticence.

'The Guards,' repeated Ferris. 'I am

more than ever astonished that you can entertain, even as an experiment, the idea of living in Australia.'

'I am no longer in the army,' said Barrington, curtly; and added, in a manner that left no room for further questioning: 'I think you said that you knew Lord Dolph Bassett?'

'He has a selection down the Koorong, about fifteen miles from Kooralbyn.'

'Kooralbyn is the name of Mr. Longleat's property?' asked Barrington, anxious to divert the conversation from himself. 'A native word, I presume?'

'Meaning the "abode of serpents." Certain poetic swains have dubbed Miss Longleat the Enchantress of Kooralbyn, and, in a confusion of classical metaphors, have addressed her in sonnets as Medusa and Circe. Apart from its feminine attraction, Kooralbyn is worth a visit. The country is wild, picturesque, inspiring. It might be the refuge of a

Timon, or the dream-land of a poet. Come over and see it. But you err in using the word *property*. In your acceptation of the term, there is no property in Australia. The owner of freehold is the petty agriculturist, the representative of a lower order of settler than the squatter. The bloated aristocrat is he who leases from the Crown, and whose rich pastures are only his own till a new land law, a mine, or a railway turns a horde of free selectors loose upon his borders. Mr. Longleat professes impartiality and sympathy with all classes. It is his political creed, and he finds that it brings him in popularity. Lord Dolph took up land on Kooralbyn. Longleat smiled grimly, and offered to help him brand his cattle. They are the best of friends, but at first the squatterarchy of the Koorong rose up in a body and named its hero, martyr.'

'Lord Dolph, then, is a free selector?'

'He cattle-farms a few thousand acres after an amateur fashion. My lady breaks in

the horses and takes care that the calves are branded. It is said that she has an eye to business, and does not disdain nuggeting.* She was a Koorong girl, a sonsie Scotch lassie, and he married her because he was told that it was the correct thing for a bushman to have a wife. He builds rustic bridges, fancies pigs and poultry, plays the piano, and poses as a squatter in moleskins and a cabbage-tree hat. She manages the farm.'

'A fair division of labour,' returned Barrington.

'You will find it dull at Dyraaba,' continued Mr. Ferris; 'and Lord Dolph will probably propose a visit to Kooralbyn. Mr. Longleat will be in Leichardt's Town occupied with political matters, unless, indeed, the Ministry goes out at the beginning of the session. I shall, however, be charmed to introduce you to my wife and daughter. You

* To *nugget:* in Australian slang, to appropriate your neighbours' unbranded calves.

may, or may not, see Miss Longleat; that will be as the caprice takes her.'

'Your allusions to this young lady pique my curiosity. Is the Enchantress of Kooralbyn a person indeed out of the common; or is she merely a pretty rustic, spoiled by flattery?'

'Rustic!' repeated Mr. Ferris, chuckling softly to himself. 'I dare say that you have seen some of the most beautiful women in Europe; nevertheless, you will certainly admire Honoria Longleat. A fine piece of flesh, with money to enhance her charms.'

'She is an only child, then?'

'No; Mr. Longleat has been twice married. His first wife, the mother of Honoria, was a beautiful drab, whom I believe he picked up at the Diggings. His second was the daughter of a squatter on the Ubi Ubi. She died at the birth of a girl, her only one, now a child of seven. The Premier's matrimonial arrangements and my own have been

curiously similar. I also have had two wives; my second is still living. I have my theories, sir, upon marriage as upon other subjects. I consider a carefully-discriminated diversity the important element in the generation of a perfect type. Since I could not succeed in making a mark in the world, I was determined to beget a celebrity. I chose my wife upon physiological principles. The result would have been all that could have been desired had she presented me with a son. Mrs. Ferris has failed in the one duty which I required of her. You see, disappointment is my doom.'

'But, Miss Longleat's fortune?' suggested Barrington, recalling the old man to his own point of interest.

'True! When Honoria, Longleat's eldest daughter, was a baby in arms, old Jem Bagot, a ticket-of-leave man, and the Premier's pal when they drove bullock-teams together between Leichardt's Town and Kooya, left her

a bit of land in the Tarrangella district, which was then considered of little value. This bit of land is now the great Tarrangella tin mine, bringing in somewhere about four thousand per annum.'

'And is this fortune absolutely her own?' asked Barrington, excitedly.

'It will be, absolutely, upon the day that she is twenty-one. At present the income is accumulating for her benefit. Oh, she is a great heiress. There's Kooralbyn and Mundubbera, the valley of the Leichardt, the house in Leichardt's Town, and the Lord knows how many political pickings, to be divided between her and little Janie. And she is her father's favourite. A fine thing to be transported in the old days, eh? if a man had brains and luck. A fine thing for a woman to be handsome and rich. What does it matter if her father was a bullock-driver, and her mother—' Mr. Ferris shrugged his shoulders significantly. 'In polite

society nobody asks any embarrassing questions. There's only one thing in the world better than money and beauty, and that's genius. I have a daughter, too, Mr. Barrington, and I am as proud of her as Longleat is of his, but in a different way—a very different way.'

'Miss Ferris is talented, perhaps?' said Barrington.

'My Angela will be a great artist,' said Mr. Ferris, lifting his head with a sublimity of conviction that amused while it silenced his companion. 'Sir,' he added, with a kind of proud humility, 'I know my weakness; I know my failings. The soul of genius was born with me, but not the power of fulfilment. I have prayed that I might be the father of an artist who should combine inspiration and execution. Do I not know the ecstasy of vision, and the hell of inability? I said to myself, "I will beget a son who shall be great." Two generations could not

be foredoomed to failure. Instead of a son, a daughter was born to me—a frail creature, visionary and mystical, with an extraordinary development of the creative faculty. From the day that, as a child, she drew upon the floor and wall rough sketches with a piece of chalk, I devoted her to the cause of art. Nature has been her nurse. Cradled in the lap of inspiration, she has led an ideal life among woods and mountains. It is for her sake that I labour; for her sake that I submit to insult and degradation. I have saved a thousand pounds to be expended upon her artistic education. In a year's time I shall take her to Italy; in ten, the name of Ferris will be renowned.'

Barrington listened in amused toleration of the old man's tall talk. He no more believed in Angela Ferris's genius than he believed in Honoria Longleat's beauty; yet he felt a languid interest in both subjects, and would have liked to pursue them. Clearly there

was a covert antagonism between Ferris and his patron; and being an observer of human nature, in default of better occupation, Barrington was ready to follow up the current of jealousy and crabbed conceit to its source. The old man, however, rose abruptly.

'You seem a link between my former life and the present. Your companionship has excited me beyond my wont, and I have talked of matters which are purely personal. Pray attach no importance to my wandering speech. I am a soured old man. Now, I have smoked out my pipe, and the storm is threatening closely. There has been heavy rain in Leichardt's Town. I'll say good-night. You start early to-morrow morning, but we shall meet ere long at Kooralbyn.'

Mr. Ferris shuffled indoors to the coffee-room, and thence to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WEAVING OF THE SPELL.

THE coach rattled on beyond the outskirts of Kooya, past plantations of pine-apples and bananas, and pretty wooden cottages embedded in orange-groves and vineyards, till cultivation and even clearing ceased, and hedges of cactus and acacia, or rough stockading that divided the settlers' paddocks from the road, gave place to monotonous forests of she-oak and eucalyptus, where there was the brooding stillness of a coming storm. At intervals the driver paused before a bush inn, of which, at long distances apart, there were several

standing solitary among the trees, to change horses, call for the mail, or give the passengers an opportunity of descending for refreshment. The night closed in; a murky cloud grew black overhead, and occasional growlings of thunder told that the storm was advancing.

Mrs. Vallancy and Mr. Longleat were practically alone in the hinder part of the coach, and their *tête-à-tête*, carried on under cover of the rattling of bolts and springs, the flapping of curtains and general din of motion, was inaudible to the men in front.

'How kind of you it was to give up the box-seat and come here to amuse me,' said Mrs. Vallancy in her pathetic monotone. 'It would have been too horrid had I been placed beside any of our companions. I can never be sufficiently grateful to Providence for sending you to Leichardt's Town this evening.'

'I do not like to think that you often travel by yourself in this way,' said Longleat.

'I do not *often* travel by myself,' replied she, mimicking his tone, 'only when necessity obliges me, as is the case to-night. I thought that you admired independent women. You have certainly said so,' she added, alluding to one of his public speeches in which he had advocated female labour in certain Government departments.

'The women I meant aren't of your sort. There's things which drag down both sexes alike, and both should be on the same ground. I should like to see all women taught to work for their bread. When I meet one with the pluck to take her own line, and fight against poverty and prejudice, I respect her for it; but it cuts me to the quick to see a young, timid, and, if you'll excuse my saying it, pretty creature like you, who has the right to look for protection from others, jostled about in this way. You should

not travel alone at night in a public conveyance like Cobb's. You lay yourself open to—to——'

'Unpleasant remark,' she said, concluding his stammering sentence. 'Yes, I understand; you are right; but it is not my fault—you ought to know that I dislike it. If you were my—my father let us say—you would not allow me to go about like this. But you are not my father. I have no one to take care of me—except my husband. I am married, yet there is no one more solitary than I am. The world is hard to me. I am thrown upon outsiders for sympathy and support. And because two or three friends who happen to be men give these to me, society judges me cruelly. Is it not so?'

Mrs. Vallancy turned her large eyes upon Mr. Longleat with a frank, confiding expression of which she was mistress. He was regarding her fixedly, but as their eyes met, he abruptly withdrew his gaze; and turned

his face away without answering her plaintive question.

Given a nascent interest, rapidly deepening into a powerful predilection, and an unconventional combination of circumstances, which places the admirer in close propinquity with the object of his attraction, it will depend entirely upon the man's idiosyncrasy whether the position inspires deference or awakens passion.

In the case of the typical gentleman, that chivalrous loyalty which is as much inherent as the result of education, forbids the merest suggestion of license; but the man of coarse fibre and rude training, who has made it his creed to seize opportunity for the furtherance of ambition or the accomplishment of desire, and who is ignorant of the subtle definitions of a refined code of honour, though he may accurately limit his intentions, has less control over his emotions. Such a man does not analyse his inner feelings. There are in

his nature no softening shadows, nor can he comprehend the imperceptible blending of passive interest with active regard. With him the machinery of passion comes into sudden play, and startles by the violent effect it produces.

Mr. Longleat sat silent for some moments, taking no notice of several discursive observations with which she sought to relieve his embarrassment. He felt shy of addressing her, and tried to steer his thoughts into more impersonal channels. He endeavoured to direct them towards the political conflict in store for him, which for months past had held his nerves in a state of tension. In the estimation of the inhabitants of Leichardt's Town the coming session was merely a pleasant stimulus to excitement, and the present determinant of a railway that must sooner or later be built. To Longleat, it meant the crowning act of his career, upon which rested the balance of victory or defeat. It was the

climax of a struggle for supremacy involving his dearest ambitions and affections.

The least poetic man who has succeeded in life is conscious at times of a vein of romance permeating a temperament that he has been proud to style 'matter of fact.' It is the perception of the ideal side by side with the actual, that gives courage to encounter and surmount difficulties. He who is devoid of imagination rarely accomplishes a great enterprise. A man may scoff at superstition and yet have a dim consciousness of occult influence at work upon his destiny. At this moment Mr. Longleat felt a curious presentiment that he was approaching a crisis in his fate, and that Mrs. Vallancy, whose presence affected him so strongly, had unknowingly identified herself with his failure or success.

As they drove on through the deepening darkness, a sense of unreality oppressed him, and it seemed to him that he was being whirled in a dream through an enchanted

forest to a destination of which he was ignorant. At last, ashamed and annoyed at his unusual susceptibility, Mr. Longleat started forward and pulled himself together, uttering an ironical 'Pshaw!'

'What is the matter?' asked Mrs. Vallancy.

'Nothing. By the way, I hear that Mr. Fielding has sailed for Melbourne.'

'He left Leichardt's Town last week by the mail-boat,' replied Mrs. Vallancy, with a perceptible alteration in her voice.

'Is it true that you went down to the Bay to see him off?'

'Yes. My husband was with me. Was there any harm in that?'

'I suppose not,' answered Mr. Longleat. Then added in a tone of displeasure, 'You were very friendly with Fielding when he was in Leichardt's Town.'

'Are you too going to cavil at my friendships?' said Mrs. Vallancy, plaintively. 'I had fancied, though indeed I can hardly tell

why, for we have known each other but a short time, that I could always count upon kindness from you.'

'I need not tell you that you may always count upon that,' replied Mr. Longleat. 'Will you not say—friendship?'

'What could one desire more than kindness? If I asked anything else, I should beg that you would put aside any feeling of animosity you may entertain towards my husband, and that you would come and see me sometimes. You have not been within my doors,'

'I—I have not ventured,' stammered Longleat, who had alternations of boldness and timidity; 'but if I may see you home after your journey——'

'My husband will probably meet me at the Australasian when the coach arrives,' said Mrs. Vallancy, 'but if not, I shall gratefully take advantage of your offer. Ah!' she cried, 'what a vivid flash! I am as weak as

a baby in thunder and lightning. I can only hide my face and tremble.'

'There's a storm coming up,' said Longleat, 'but it is from the mildest quarter, and will soon be over. Do not be frightened.'

'I cannot help feeling terrified. Of course I know that the chances are a thousand to one against any harm befalling me; the terror is partly from association. When I was a child; my nurse used to keep me good during a thunderstorm by telling me that God was angry, and still I cannot overcome the uneasy sense that some one who has no sympathy with my weaknesses is scolding me mightily.'

Then came another flash, followed by an angry concussion, and she cowered back, laying her trembling hand upon Mr. Longleat's arm.

Presently she asked:

'Are you ever angry with your daughter?'

'Angry with Honoria! By Jove, no! She has a spice of the Tartar in her composition, and would not stand being scolded. She

takes her own way. I dare say it is fortunate for us both that her will does not often clash with mine.'

'And when it pulls her in a contrary direction to that which you wish, you turn and let her lead you?'

'No,' replied Longleat, gruffly. 'In some matters I am a fool where my daughter is concerned, but for all that, I'm master of myself.'

'She must be very happy,' continued Mrs. Vallancy plaintively. 'When I was quite young I had my own way too. I used to think that I needed only to ask in order to get what I wanted; but since I married I have found life different. After all, we white women are no better off than the lubras;* we are sold like them, and then we have to walk behind our lords and bear their burdens.'

Now the storm broke in quick, angry claps of thunder and vivid flashes of forked lightning, which illuminated the coach in

* Young aboriginal woman.

momentary gleams, and showed the frightened leaders, as, snorting and plunging, they turned wildly in their traces.

'Who-oa!' shouted the driver, as he cut the animals sharply with his whip. 'What are you shying at now?'

The coach rattled on over a wooden bridge, while the rain descended in heavy drops that penetrated the ill-constructed awning.

'Oh dear!' sighed Mrs. Vallancy, 'I'm getting so wet.'

Mr. Longleat unstrapped his poncho and placed it round her shoulders, then with one hand held down the flapping curtains in order to protect her somewhat from the driving shower. A strong wind had succeeded the late stillness, and blew upon their faces, bearing an exhilarating sense of coolness. Gradually the thunder became fainter, and the lightning less brilliant; the storm was passing over, and the passengers in front began to talk again about politics and crops and cattle

—conversation in which at any other time the Premier would have joined with interest, but which to-night resembled in his mind the refrain of a vivid dream.

Soon the wind and rain ceased; the sky became clear and blue; the Southern Cross rose gem-like above the horizon; and the moon shone brightly. The horses were brisk again, and the coach plashed heavily through pools left by the storm; the clammy heat had given place to a delicious feeling of freshness and moisture; the air was fragrant with the perfume of wild-flowers and scented gum; and myriads of insects, silenced during the day by the choking dust, filled the night with inarticulate murmurings.

The houses along the road became more numerous, and the lights of Leichardt's Town shone, one by one, like stars through the trees. The bush merged imperceptibly into a straggling street, and the coach paused for a moment to pay toll at a bridge which spanned

the Leichardt River. The stream, here about a quarter of a mile wide, and with scarcely a ripple upon its leaden surface, rolled between low wharf-lined banks and green gardens towards the sea. The lights of small craft, dotted here and there, seemed like reflections from the sky above; and the moon shed her beams across the track of a ferry-boat that plied monotonously to and fro. Over the water there was a faint, distant buzz; but here, the tinkle of the steamér bells, and the voices of the boatmen calling to waiting passengers, 'Hoi-ahoi-o-ovēr,' were the only distinct sounds in the deep stillness.

The coach drove slowly across the bridge into the city proper. Here the streets were wide and well-built, the shops gaily lighted, and the traffic considerable. Now the driver pulled up before a large hotel in the principal thoroughfare.

A little crowd had collected about the

verandah; the passengers alighted, and the Premier assisted Mrs. Vallancy to the ground. She gazed helplessly about her.

'I cannot see my husband,' she said. 'Since he is not here I will gratefully avail myself of your escort—at least to the ferry.'

The Premier hailed a passing jingle. He placed Mrs. Vallancy and her luggage upon the back seat of this ill-balanced vehicle, and stationing himself in front with the driver gave the order, 'To the Emu Point, Upper Ferry.'

Leichardt's Town is curiously situated upon three peninsulas, lying parallel with each other, and formed by the snake-like curves of the river which divides them. The city lies in the middle, and is called the north side in contradistinction to South Leichardt's Town, with which it is connected by a bridge, while Emu Point, the suburb where Mrs. Vallancy lived, faces it again on the opposite bank. It will be readily seen that, whereas to follow the windings of the river would

necessitate a journey of some miles, by taking the ferry three times in a direct line, the distance from one side of the town to the other might be rendered comparatively slight.

The site has much natural beauty to recommend it. Like a broad blue band the Leichardt flows between undulating stretches of lightly-wooded country. Here and there, beyond the line of wharves and stores, the banks rise rocky and precipitous, and overgrown with ferns and the variegated latarna; but mostly slope gently to the water's edge in gardens and grassy pastures, fringed with mangrove; while in the suburbs white roads wind among clumps of feathery bamboos, or by acacia hedges, which bound pretty villas and verandahed cottages. In the distant west there lies a low range of hills, which shuts out the view of the river; to the east the broadening stream hurries downward to the sea.

The lower part of the middle point, to

which Mr. Longleat and Mrs. Vallancy were at this time driving, is intersected by a long street, at one end of which lies a ferry, while at the other the Parliamentary Chambers, comprised in an imposing stone structure of the modern nondescript style of architecture, overlook the river and South Leichardt's Town. The extremity of the point is divided into two allotments. In one of these stands Government House, surrounded by its trim lawns and shrubberies. The other is laid out in parterres, grass-plots, and cool walks, overshadowed by flowering mimosæ, palms, and bunya trees. These gardens are always open for public resort. Opposite them, the river-bank rises high and rocky, and is crowned by villas overgrown with creepers, and commanding a view of the whole town. Here Mrs. Vallancy lived.

Near the Houses of Parliament, encroaching, as it were, upon the public pleasure-grounds, and divided from them by a screen

of bamboo-trees, there is an enclosure in which at that time stood Mr. Longleat's town-house. It was a two-storied building, with green venetian shutters and a deep verandah, and was hidden from the street by clumps of oleanders and two giant Moreton Bay fig-trees.

But Mr. Longleat and his companion, driving straight towards the ferry, passed considerably to the left of this house, which lay almost the length of the street behind them, when, after dismissing their jingle, they stood upon the wooden ferry steps, and waited till the plash of oars announced the return of the boat.

They seated themselves at the stern, and were rowed across the river. The boatman talked freely as he leisurely dipped his oars. His name was Pettit, and he was a well-known character in Leichardt's Town. He spoke in a precise, dogmatic manner, and moved a pair of toothless jaws in a rapid and discursive monologue.

Yes, there *had* been a heavy storm—but it made no odds to *him;* wet or dry, it was his business to pull across that 'ere darned river; and there was folks as swore if the boat warn't at one crossing, and cussed wuss if it warn't at the other. . . . He didn't want to name no names, but there wur a gent living not very far up the Emu Point hill, as wur sometimes a bit tight, and most often waxy. He wished now that the House was going to sit, that this 'ere gent, who was a member of the Council, would go and strike his diggings at the other side. And if Longleat, he added, unconscious of the identity of his passenger, would get another bridge built, instead of making a railway that wur only good for squatters and free selectors, why *he*, for one, wouldn't cry out.

Mr. Longleat paid the toll of pence, and offered Mrs. Vallancy his arm, to aid her in ascending the steep hill. The road was rough and the dwellings scattered, and there was no

light but that of the moon to guide them along the straggling street, wet with the late downpour. They walked up the rugged foot-path, her occasional stumbles and clinging hold deepening Mr. Longleat's sense of protection, while in his breast rose a strong feeling of indignation against the supine indifference of Mr. Vallancy, who had permitted his wife to make so late a journey unattended, and who, by failing to meet her at the stopping-place of the coach, had left her to the tender mercy of any chance traveller who might offer his escort across the river.

Longleat's thoughts found vent in words.

'It is not right,' he said impulsively, 'that you should be left to shift for yourself in this way. . . . Suppose that I—that I had not been travelling down from Kooya this evening, what would have become of you?'

'I should have arrived in Leichardt's Town in the most commonplace manner,' replied Mrs. Vallancy lightly, though there

was a tremor in her voice which did not fail to deepen his compassion. 'Then, not finding my husband at the Australasian, I should have taken a fly to the ferry. Pettit would have been delighted to offer me his protection. I should have procured the escort of a little boy from the Ferry House, and should have reached home in perfect safety. Oh! I am accustomed to taking care of myself. There are not many knights-errant in Australia, Mr. Longleat, and I have looked too long on the dark side of human nature to expect, under any circumstances, to find that men are actuated by chivalrous impulses. I should at first have felt shy and extremely uncomfortable, and the storm would have frightened me horribly; afterwards I should have looked at the situation from a philosophic point of view, and should probably have listened with a deep, personal interest to the political conversation of the men in front of me. I now feel myself quite in a

position to judge of the advantages of your projected railway. . . . I suppose,' she went on, 'that you will soon be in the thick of your Parliamentary battle. I used to feel glad when the Session opened. While the House is sitting I am left more alone, and have greater liberty to do as I please. That is a bad speech for a wife to make, is it not? But you understand me; and why should I play the hypocrite when all the world knows so well what I must feel? Now I shall be rather sorry when the conflict begins, for I have learned to look upon you as a friend, and politics will keep us apart.'

'I do not see why that should be,' said Longleat.

'You and my husband belong to antagonistic factions.'

'That need not make any difference to you and me. Look here, Mrs. Vallancy; I'm not the man to brag about my own doings, but it's a fact that I should not have

worked up to the top of the tree if I hadn't stuck staunch to my friends, irrespective of faction. It is not because your husband is on Middleton's side that I—that I——' he stammered, hardly daring to finish the sentence which had almost escaped him.

'That you dislike him,' added Mrs. Vallancy, softly. 'I know—I know—I'm afraid that he is not—popular. . . . I wish,' she exclaimed impulsively, then hesitated—'I wish that he was not in the Council.' She paused, uncertain of her ground, then boldly tried to frame in words the thought which during the drive from Kooya had been uppermost in her mind: 'If he had some regular employment which would bring him in money and furnish him with a vent for his energies. . . . We are very poor; we are deeply in debt. *I* bear the burden of it all. I am a miserable woman. . . . It would make me so much happier if—— *You* could help me to become happier.'

'I don't see how that is possible,' said Longleat, looking down upon her, and not exactly apprehending her meaning. I cannot rid you of an incubus, as I would do if I had the power. Tell me in what way I can help you. If I *can* do anything for you, you have only got to ask me.'

'Suppose,' said Mrs. Vallancy, emboldened by his manner, and turning her eyes towards his face as they walked on together—'suppose that I were to ask you to give my husband an appointment—a police magistrate's post, perhaps—work which would take him away from Leichardt's Town—from temptations.'

The Premier started as though he had been stung, and Mrs. Vallancy felt in a moment that she had overshot her mark.

'You need not be afraid,' she exclaimed, in a bantering tone; 'I would not for the world tamper even by suggestion with Ministerial policy—I know that subject is sacred. Don't

rebuke me too severely for my boldness; I could not bear to fall under your wrath. But, apart from joking, I thought that it was considered diplomatic to buy off an opponent.'

'That may be the creed of some politicians,' said Longleat, excitedly; 'it isn't mine. I've kep' my hands clean since the day I took my seat upon the Treasury bench. My worst enemy can't say agen me that I've ever given away a Government place to curry favour with an adversary or to pay a friend. I'm glad that you call it joking, Mrs. Vallancy. It 'ud cut my heart to refuse you anything that you asked for serious; but I couldn't do that.'

'Promise me that you'll think no more of it,' she urged; 'I couldn't bear to feel that you were angry with me.'

'It wouldn't be possible for me to be angry with you,' he said. 'There are—there might be other ways of helping you, if you'd let me name them.'

'We have reached my cottage,' she said, pausing before a wicket-gate, which gave access to a dim-looking garden situated upon the brow of the hill. 'You will come and see me soon, and tell me what is in your mind. Won't you come in now? Oh yes! my husband will be glad to know,' she added, with a touch of sarcasm in her tone, 'that I have been so efficiently escorted from the Australasian.'

Mr. Longleat hesitated for a moment, then entered.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. VALLANCY'S HOME.

MRS. VALLANCY and Mr. Longleat walked up the narrow path leading to the house and stepped on to the verandah, which was wide and breezy, and upon one side overlooked the river. The wooden posts were festooned by trailing creepers, through which the moonbeams shed quivering shadows upon the boards; and without, the shrubs of heliotrope and purple magnolia that bordered the grass-plat made the night air heavy with perfume.

Mrs. Vallancy softly tried one of the venetian shutters, then finding that it did not yield

to her touch, rang a little bell that hung against the wall.

Presently a maid opened the French window, and Mrs. Vallancy led the way into the drawing-room, a pretty room, encumbered with furniture, unoccupied, and dimly lighted by a shaded lamp, which was placed upon a small table near the fireplace. There was a door upon the opposite side of the apartment, which was closed.

'Is your master at home?' asked Mrs. Vallancy.

'I think, ma'am, that he is smoking in the dining-room,' was the reply.

Mrs. Vallancy motioned Mr. Longleat to a seat, opened the inner door, and passed into the next room, where she faced her husband.

He was an unprepossessing-looking man, tall and rakish, with a shambling gait and dissipated appearance, yet with the indefinable stamp of gentility upon his features and

clothes. Mr. Vallancy's income was known to be almost nominal, nevertheless he was always well-dressed, played high, had loose cash, drank expensive wines in no small quantity, and, though he kept but a small number of servants, lived luxuriously.

'What the deuce was all that tomfoolery about the Ansons?' was his greeting to his wife; 'and why didn't you come home when you first intended?'

'They wished me to remain, and I did not suppose that my absence made any difference to you. They nursed me, and were kind to me. You seem to forget, Edward, that I am not strong and that I need consideration,' said Mrs. Vallancy; and Mr. Longleat, in the next room, remarked the defiant tone of her voice.

'It would be strange if I forgot it. You are always wanting a change and posing as an injured innocent. Your ill-health is entirely owing to your abominable temper. I

think that it is time you came back, though when you are at home you make yourself so deucedly unpleasant that I am glad to be rid of you.'

'I expected that you would meet me at Kooya,' she said, resentfully.

'You might have known better. I have not the money to travel about the country at your pleasure.'

'You have generally money to do what you like,' she retorted in a low tone. 'Take care what you say: there is some one in the drawing-room.'

'Whom have you got here now?'

'As I was alone, Mr. Longleat, who travelled with me in the coach, was kind enough to accompany me from the Australasian,' said Mrs. Vallancy, in a louder tone, as she threw open the door behind her, and Longleat, feeling somewhat uncomfortable, rose and advanced towards the husband and wife.

'How do you do?' said Mr. Vallancy

sulkily, shaking hands with his political foe. 'It's very hot this evening. The storm don't seem to have cleared the air much.'

'The thunder is still hovering about,' said Mr. Longleat. 'I think that I ought to be going across the water again. I only wanted to see Mrs. Vallancy safe within doors. It's getting late, and I've had a long journey from Kooralbyn.'

'You're down for the Opening, I suppose,' said Vallancy. 'You'll find no end of fellows at the club. Have something before you go. Connie, why the deuce don't you see that there's ice in the house?'

'I do not care about anything, thank you,' replied Mr. Longleat, hastily. 'Nothing, I beg. I must really be off. Good-night. Good-night, Mrs. Vallancy.'

'I'll let you out,' she said, moving on before him.

She held the door open for him to pass through, then closed it behind them both.

When they had reached the verandah, she paused, and timidly touched his arm.

'You'll come again soon,' she said. 'You see I want friends; I'm nearly always at home in the afternoons. Come in a day or two—before Parliament opens.'

'Yes, I'll come,' said Mr. Longleat, forgetting, under the influence of the moment, a prudent resolve that he had made in the verandah.

'Connie!' called Vallancy, from within.

'Good-bye,' she murmured, waving her hand lightly; then re-entered the dining-room, where her husband had seated himself at the table.

'Give me a kiss,' he said. 'I'm glad to see you home again. I wish you'd look happier. I've had cursed bad luck at cards to-night, and I was annoyed because you never wrote to me from the Ansons. If I had known that Longleat was in the next room, I should not have spoken to you so angrily.'

'What does it matter? it is nothing new,' she said, without moving to grant him the embrace for which he had asked.

Her apathy showed no trace of resentment. He looked at her for a moment with an expression half ironical, half despairing; then sullenly drooped his head upon his breast. Presently he asked suddenly: 'Where is the brandy? Get me some, if you please.'

'I would not take any more, if I were you,' she replied coldly.

'If you were me, and had business matters to worry you, you'd be glad enough to take something which would help you to forget them. Bring me something strong. I'm tired; I cannot drink this wash.'

'I suppose that I have my worries too,' she answered bitterly. 'If I had yours, I'd face them honestly. I wouldn't drink champagne every evening and leave my butcher unpaid; I wouldn't play at cards, and smoke

expensive cigars, and talk big, when I knew all the time that I could not meet the bills I'd asked my friends to back for me; I would not besot and stupefy myself till there wasn't an ounce of manliness left in me.'

'You're a bold woman, to speak to me in this way,' said Vallancy. 'What do you mean?'

'If you had been a true man you would never have asked Brian Fielding to lend you money!' she exclaimed recklessly.

'Who told you that? What has he been saying? It was money that he owed me. Explain yourself.'

'It was money borrowed,' said she incisively. 'It is not the first time that you have—turned circumstances to your advantage; but I warned you to spare *him*. I warned you not to goad me too far.'

'Have you suddenly turned prude?' said Vallancy, roused by her manner. 'I've let you have your own way without asking ques-

tions ; but if I really believed that you cared for Fielding, I'd——'

'You'd borrow more money from him,' said she, with bitter sarcasm.

'You go too far,' said Vallancy, lifting his sullen, red eyes from the table-cloth. 'Take care how you irritate me. I know you too well to give you credit for any sentimental weakness. I have allowed you liberty because I knew that you were too selfish to abuse it. I discovered long ago that you only married me because you thought I was rich. How rightly you have been served! If you had taken any pains to please me, I should have been a different husband to you. You have no heart. Even when the child died you did not fret.'

'A woman does not *fret* when her heart is broken,' said Mrs. Vallancy, with the sound of suppressed tears in her voice. 'You make me hard. You teach me to be bad——'

She was leaving the room, but he detained her.

'You have not got me the brandy.'

She went out, and presently returned with a decanter of spirits which she placed before him.

'Don't go yet; I have something else to say to you. Why did you bring Longleat here to-night?'

'I told you that we were travelling together in the coach. Seeing that I was alone he very kindly brought me home. I could do nothing else than ask him in.'

'I detest that man!' exclaimed Mr. Vallancy, savagely. 'I would do him an ill-turn if I could. I owe him more than one. They would have given me the chairmanship of committees if he had not been against me. Well, his day is nearly over.'

'Do you think so? Surely he will carry his Loan Bill.'

'I would lay any money that he does not. The majority will oppose him.'

Mrs. Vallancy shrugged her shoulders, but said nothing.

'Forbes has resigned the police magistracy of Gundaroo,' continued Mr. Vallancy, 'and Middleton has promised it to me, if he comes into power. It's a beastly hole. You won't like going there.'

Gundaroo, a new northern settlement, was at that time the Ultima Thule of civilisation in Leichardt's Land, but the post was important, and there was a considerable salary attached to it.

Mrs. Vallancy looked interested.

'You would take it?'

'Yes; for a short time. There seems no prospect of anything better; and the screw is good and would help me to get rid of this load of debt.'

'Middleton is not in power yet,' said Mrs. Vallancy quietly, and left the room.

'If I could only persuade Longleat to send him there,' she said to herself as she stood

looking at her pretty but haggard face in the toilet-glass. 'Have I no heart? Oh, Brian! you know that——'

* * * * *

A word about Connie Vallancy.

Her father had been one of the first Government Residents in Leichardt's Land. In the early days of the colony, when emigration was principally confined to the more energetic members of the upper classes of English society; when handsome cadets, full of pluck and adventure, became dare-devil pioneers, eager to distinguish themselves by feats of horsemanship and reckless bravery; when hardships were numerous, and the joys of life scarce, so that a pretty girl was worshipped as a goddess straight from Olympus, Connie Brabourne had been the belle of the district.

Before she was seventeen there was hardly an unmarried man in the colony who had not made her an offer. She was a terrible

coquette, exacted admiration as her tribute, and thought it rather a feather in her cap to be styled a heartless flirt. At last came upon the scene one Brian Fielding, a tall, handsome squatter, well born and travelled, with no money to speak of, but plenty of assurance, and with a fascinating manner that women found it difficult to resist.

The two fell desperately in love with each other, and entered into an indefinite sort of engagement, of which the consummation was to be delayed till Brian possessed a station of his own and a house in Sydney. But Connie's father was ambitious; and she too was vain and light of love, and had cherished lurking visions of life in England, of costly clothes, and unlimited admiration from higher quarters. Brian went back to his post of superintendent at an inland station, which had an unpronounceable name, and a mail once in three months; and Connie, to whom flirting had acquired a new stimulus from the fact of

its being a forbidden luxury, was left unsupported in the midst of temptations to inconstancy, and finally threw over her lover in favour of Mr. Vallancy, who had aristocratic connections and the reputation of wealth.

There was a story of intercepted letters, of treachery and compulsion; but be that as it may, Connie Brabourne married Mr. Vallancy in the Leichardt's Town church, and went off with him for her honeymoon in England.

She soon found that her husband's riches were mythical, and that her 'grand match' resolved itself into poverty, brag, a taste for expensive luxuries without the means of gratifying it, and doubtful treatment by her new relatives, who flouted her and despised him. She was at first passionately discontented, then fell into a state of listless melancholy, and finally became reckless and defiant.

After a year or two of Bohemian existence

in Europe, during which Connie's knowledge of the evil side of humanity deepened considerably, they returned to Leichardt's Land.

Mr. Vallancy was created a member of the Legislative Council, and made it his aim toget into power; but, being of an aggressive and cantankerous disposition, contrived to render himself so obnoxious to both political parties that the lucrative Government appointment which he hoped to obtain always dangled temptingly just beyond his reach.

He would condescend to no secondary place, and was loth to deprive himself of the opportunity of making disagreeable allusions in the House. Nothing less than the bait of a police magistracy and a good salary would have satisfied his pride; and as his influence was small, and his abusive attacks were merely pinpricks, the Government in power always hesitated to buy him at his own price. He kept up a good appearance, though

everyone knew that he was steeped in debt, and there were ugly rumours afloat as to the source of the ready money by means of which he staved off disgrace.

An unfortunate marriage may produce in a woman either a state of passive indifference or of emotional craving after some outward form of satisfaction. In Constance Vallancy's case flirtation seemed the only antidote to disappointment. She had no high-souled yearnings to carry her beyond the influence of her passionate excitability. She had begun life with the self-made compact that caresses and admiration were to be her portion, and seeing that they were denied her from a legitimate quarter, could not overcome a sense of ill-usage, while in her heart there was always presenta cankerous regret after Brian Fielding, the one man she had truly loved.

Her disposition held no truth-compelling instincts to define the boundary between right and wrong, and contact with an ignoble,

self-indulgent nature brought into force a tendency to deceit. She lied to her husband, justifying falsehood as a weapon against irritable vanity and unreasonable abuse. So she fed her morbid longings upon the stimulant of coquetry, and though she had not suffered actual shipwreck, had more than once steered dangerously near the rocks.

Shortly before the opening of this story Brian Fielding, still fascinating and still poor, reappeared in Leichardt's Town, and renewed his acquaintance with Mrs. Vallancy. He had met her at first with a simulated indifference, which had roused her old passion and piqued her desire for conquest; then he alternately sought and avoided her, and finally had drifted into a sweet but dangerous friendship.

This state of things was broken by Mr. Fielding's sudden departure for Melbourne on a matter of business, likely to result in a permanent appointment in that city.

The fact of his wife's former engagement was a secret to Mr. Vallancy; otherwise it may be doubted whether, base though he was, he would have encouraged the intercourse. Connie had flirted scores of times since their marriage, and he had profited by her love of admiration to borrow money from her adorers; but, to do him justice, he did not doubt her fidelity. He loved her after an unreasonable fashion, at one time caressing, at another upbraiding her, and making her the *confidante* of his petty ambitions and knavish intrigues, till any womanly delicacy that she might have possessed was blunted to cynical indifference.

A weary distaste for life fell upon her after Brian's departure. She panted for freedom, and scorn of her husband became transformed to active hatred. Oh to be rid of the incubus! She was reckless enough to have eloped with Brian had he been willing to take her. But there was no money on either side;

she could not ruin his prospects, and there were times, too, when she felt that her influence was waning, and almost doubted the sincerity of his devotion. And now he was gone, and though he had promised to write to her—had sworn not to forget her, the consolation of his presence had departed from her. Money troubles were weighing upon her. She was beginning to feel the pressure of want; creditors threatened. She was wretched; felt ill, and was losing her beauty. Her overmastering desire now was to escape from the irritation of her husband's presence, and to secure wealth and freedom from annoyance.

At this juncture she became intimate with the Premier.

CHAPTER VI.

'YOU MUST MARRY HONORIA LONGLEAT.'

EARLY the next morning Barrington and Tom Dungie left Kooya. The former was mounted upon one of Lord Dolph's hacks, while Dungie rode the little piebald, which he frequently apostrophised in terms admonitory or admiring. He carried his mail-bags strapped in front of his saddle, and drove before him the pack-horse, which bore Barrington's luggage conveniently disposed in two canvas bags.

For some miles the road led through a semi-cultivated locality, beside portions of

uncleared forest, alternating with paddocks where browsed the lean kine that supplied Kooya with milk and butter; past bush homesteads where children clustered round the log door-steps, and shouted at the sight of strangers; by fields of yellow maize and plantations of cotton, in which the flakes of down had just burst their brown pods—till at last the trees almost met over the narrow track, even the public-houses ceased, and the last log-hut that marked the bounds of human habitation for miles to come had been left behind. Now Barrington felt himself to be in the bush.

This forest solitude, filled with the incessant chirp of locusts, the winging of butterflies, and rustling of the tall dry grass, the monotonous 'Hoo-hoo-hoo-ooo' of the Wonga pigeon, and shrill screech of the jackass, was quite unfamiliar to the Englishman, whose rambles had never before extended beyond the boundaries of Europe.

Tom Dungie rode at a jog-trot which covered the ground quickly, and was not distressing to man or beast. The mail-man was a garrulous little creature, and when he was not talking to his companion addressed a disjointed soliloquy to his horse.

'Now then, stoopid! Hain't yer learnt the track yet? Well, you air an old 'umbug, you air! Can't yer tell a log when yer sees one? Now then, 'urry along: stir your stumps! we've got to be at Kooralbyn to-night.'

'I dare say that you find Kooralbyn a pleasant stopping-place,' said Barrington, already identifying the name with Miss Longleat.

'I don't know that it ain't a little better nor some others,' said Tom, critically. 'I'm took into the kitchen instead o' being sent to the huts; but the glass of grog ain't as reglar as might be. It depends mostly on what I

bring—leastways, on what I has for Miss Longleat.'

'How is that?' asked Barrington.

'She comes down to the crossing sometimes when I'm pretty early, and takes the mail-bag herself, and then I stands and watches her open her letters. Lor'! I can tell by the handwriting if they're from her sweethearts. If I happens to have a book or summat of the sort from Mr. Dyson Maddox, it is, "Tom," says she, "I dare say you're tired. Ask Mrs. Ferris for a glass of rum;" or if I hain't got nothing pertikler, "Tom," she says, "what's the news Dyraaba way?" and so on, gradual like, to Barramunda. My word! they're sharp creatures, women. It ain't everyone as knows how to take 'em. You hain't seen her yet, have you?'

'No,' replied Barrington.

'She's awful handsome; but, bless you, I don't take no account on her. Some men

are funky upon speaking to her. I've seen gents as didn't know what to say when they looked at her—struck all of a heap, like. But women is like 'osses; them as don't understand 'em is mostly afeared on 'em.'

The narrowness of the track, which now wound among large boulders of rock, and was strewn with loose stones, compelled them to ride single file. They were descending a high range which commanded a view of the adjacent country. Half-way down, Dungie paused at a little stream, overshadowed by the glossy boughs and crimson flowers of the chestnut, and discoursed while he let his horse drink.

'Yonder is the Koorong Crag,' said he, pointing to a mountain which rose upon their right.

It had all the glory of inaccessibility; its turret-like summit surmounted a deep precipice of bare rock, which could be climbed

by no man; its base was clothed with bluish-green foliage, against which the light stems of a group of white gum-trees in the foreground stood out in vivid contrast.

'Our black fellows say that the Debbil-debbil lives up there,' continued Dungie. 'I've heard tell that a long time ago the rocks were covered with creepers, and that one of the first white settlers in the district managed to climb to the top of the mountain by holding on to them. He made a fire upon the highest point, but a wind rose and the flames spread and burned all the creepers. His bones lie bleaching up there now.'

They rode on till they reached a gorge dividing two hills. The pack-horse, well accustomed to the narrow track worn along the steep slope, trotted in front, occasionally stopping to nibble the tender shoots of the young ti-trees, while Barrington followed the

postman, who would every now and then turn his head with an evident distrust of English horsemanship.

Upon their right sloped the rocky bank of the hill they were skirting. Cairns of grey, volcanic-looking stones, piled by Nature's hand, and overgrown with rank grass and creeping indigo, necessitated frequent deviations; charred logs, the remains of bush-fires, lay across the path; the thick underwood grew dense on each side; flowering parasites hung from the branches overhead, and bines of the crimson Kennedia trailed into the streamlet that flowed at the foot of the two hills.

In places the rivulet glided gently over flat stones worn smooth by its course; here and there it tumbled in a miniature cascade over the trunk of a fallen tree, and now lay in pools still and stagnant with iridescent gleams upon its surface beneath overhanging fronds of fern. To the left of the riders, the opposite

hill rose almost perpendicularly high above their heads. Firs clung to the rocky soil, and native jessamine and waxen hoya shed their fragrance in the air. The sharp st-wt of the whip-bird and the footfalls of the horses echoed through the gorge with startling distinctness. The solitude was intense; neither aboriginal nor beast was to be seen prowling about this mountain fastness; only every now and then a rustling of dry leaves would attract attention, and the sharp head of a wallabi might be observed protruding from behind some jagged rock, and disappearing in an instant.

At length they emerged from the ravine, and mounted to the highest point of the range which bounded the Koorong district. Below them, the country stretched in smooth plains and undulating ridges; and beyond lay a succession of mountains like distant rolling waves, with here and there a more prominent peak catching the sun's reflection upon its

stony sides, and standing out in vivid contrast to the shadowy purple of the lower and further hills.

'Stop a moment,' said Barrington, pausing and involuntarily raising his hat.

Beauty of nature or of art was a powerful agent in stirring his senses to a pitch of excitement hardly warranted by his self-contained exterior. As a boy he had sometimes lain down and wept at the sudden sight of a fine landscape; and his pulses had tingled with keen emotion while he stood before a beautiful statue or a lovely pictured face. There is a poetic, quasi-intellectual passion which in some natures is hardly less potent than that aroused by wine or women.

Dungie checked his horse, and regarded his companion with reflective curiosity.

'Pretty, ain't it?' said he, with something of the pride of proprietorship. 'There ain't any district in Leichardt's Land as beats the Koorong for scenery—mountains and such like.

To be sure, the grass is not to be remarked for over-fattening,' he added, with a sigh; 'but where there's big bones, there ain't often sweet flesh. Old Anthony Ferris, Kooralbyn way, he do go almost cracked over them rocks. I've heard him screeching out his bits of poetry, till I've thought him ripe for Woogaroo madhouse. Longleat is pretty smart about the men he employs, but what made him take old Ferris for his storekeeper beats the folks up here hollow . . . Yon is the dividing range between this colony and New South Wales. Kooralbyn lays there,' indicating an extensive timbered tract that stretched eastward beneath the mountains. 'We are close upon Dyraaba now, and that's my place agen the creek. It's a bit dull sometimes, but the mail keeps me running. I've only seen three females on my selection since I took it up four years last November. One was the gell from Barramunda, as rode down with the stockman one Sunday arternoon. T'other was my lady.

She wur a-looking for the strawberry cow as got bogged in the creek, and t'other——'

Here Dungie paused, and silently ruminated for several minutes.

'And who was the third?' asked Barrington.

''Twur Miss MacCutchan,' replied Dungie, laconically. 'Now then, git along, you old stoopid! You've seen this 'ere view often enough before.'

Presently the mailman halted at a round waterhole fringed with blady grass, and overshadowed by the gnarled branches of a giant eucalyptus globulus. Here Dungie dismounted, stooped down, and pushed aside the lily-leaves which floated on the surface of the pool, washed his face and hands, and deliberately assumed a rusty black alpaca coat. His appearance was so comical and his gravity so portentous, that Barrington laughingly asked him the reason of these preparations.

'I knows my drawbacks,' said Dungie. 'I ain't much to look at; but respect goes a long way. Butter don't come no quicker for fast churning.'

With this pregnant remark Dungie's garrulity suddenly abated, and he scarcely uttered a word till they had reached a log-hut built in a cleared bit of scrub, and surrounded by a rude stockade, within which grew some lank peach-trees and straggling cabbage-plants. Just outside the hut a young woman stood busily engaged over her wash-tub. She was extremely tall and of rich colouring, with high cheek-bones and abundant dark hair.

Miss MacCutchan—for it was she—looked up as the mailman approached, wiped the soapsuds from her hands and arms, and nodded.

'Have ye got anything for me to-day, Mr. Dungie?' said she.

Dungie, leaving Barrington outside the railings, dismounted from his horse, and

presented her with a well-thumbed envelope.

'My sentiments is in there,' said he, with whining gravity; 'there's a year's mail-contract to run, and then I'm a-goin' to settle down on the selection.'

Miss MacCutchan took the letter, reddened, and thrust it into the pocket of her gown.

'Get along with you and your stupid valentines!' she cried. 'You should buy a speaking-parrot to make your soft speeches for you. Dress him up in your Sunday coat, and no one 'ud know the difference. I ain't the sort of woman to be running second to a mail-contract. You'd best be getting on your way, or you'll be late at Kooralbyn to-night.' And she obstinately resumed the scrubbing of a pair of moleskins.

Dungie meekly retreated, remounted his pony, and rode off by Barrington's side. For some time he maintained silence, then remarked, with a deep sigh:

'She's a fine young woman to look at. I've had my eye upon her for four year. I'm pretty sure what she's made of; but I ain't a-goin' to give up my mail-contract; no, not for her. That's the odds atween us.'

When they had ridden out of sight of the hut Dungie came to another standstill, took off his rusty coat, re-strapped it in his valise, and pursued his way more cheerfully. The influence of Miss MacCutchan's presence removed, loquacity returned to him, and he expatiated freely upon the beauties of the scenery and the population of the Koorong district, till the paddock-fence of Dyraaba came in sight.

A narrow creek wound round the rise upon which the house was built, and to Barrington's surprise was crossed by such a rustic bridge, as might have spanned the ornamental water of a gentleman's park in England. Near the bridge, sloping down to the water, there was an artificial rockery, the prim ele-

gance of which contrasted strangely with the wildness of forest and desolation of mountains that characterised the scene.

Instead of riding over the bridge, the postman made a round to the crossing, where the water reached to his stirrups.

'He do set store on them bits of planks and tree-stumps, does Lord Dolph,' said Dungie, contemptuously. 'The next flood in the Koorong 'ull carry them all away. For my part, I like what's in natur' better nor what's out of it; and the little piebald is far too 'cute to trust her legs on that English fal-deral.'

Dyraaba lay at the foot of a rugged hill which overshadowed the house, and was the joy of Lord Dolph's heart, and the despair of that of his stockrider. The dwelling-house, a four-roomed hut, was built of slabs and roofed with bark. Two sides were shaded by a verandah supported by rough saplings, round which twined native clematis and scrub-

creepers. The floor of the verandah was of mud; a fernery was in course of construction against the walls, and two fine plants of the staghorn variety flourished on each side of the doorway; a crimson double geranium bloomed by a verandah-post, and verbenas flowered at the sills of the unglazed windows. Behind the house a dense smoke obscured the out-buildings.

'That's my lady makin' a spree amongst the rubbish,' remarked Dungie; and presently they came in sight of Lady Dolph herself, who, with her cotton gown tucked up over her linsey petticoat, was busy picking up sticks which she threw upon the pile.

She was a comely little body, with a round rosy face, bright grey eyes, light hair and eyebrows, and a trim waist. As soon as Barrington appeared on the scene she exploded in a fit of giggling, threw down her sticks, and ran into the hut, where she presently emerged with a fair-haired, boyish-looking man, who

was smoking a short pipe, and wore his shirt-sleeves tucked up over a pair of blue-veined arms, that Barrington had last seen uncovered on the river below Eton. They had roughened considerably since then, and the good-looking, aristocratic face was sunburnt and hairy; nevertheless, there was in the youth's whole appearance an unmistakable air of refinement, quite out of keeping with his surroundings.

Adolphus Bassett, the seventh son of an impoverished peer, having shown small aptitude for the clerical profession, for which he had been intended, had upon his father's death emigrated to Australia, where he had employed his small patrimony in the purchase and stocking of Dyraaba, and had married Maggie, the daughter of one Lamb, a squatter on the Koorong. She made him an excellent wife, managed the few score of cattle which Dyraaba maintained, rode as colonial

women do ride, displayed considerable culinary skill, and was tenacious of her dignity, claiming her title even when she was engaged in salting beef and such other unrefined occupations.

Lord Dolph shook hands heartily with Barrington, who had by this time dismounted.

'Hallo! so you have turned up. I am delighted to see you; we didn't half expect you to-day. Most fellows get funked over the short cut. But Dungie is a capital pioneer. You can't go wrong if you follow the little piebald. She's a rare one, isn't she, Tom? I say, this don't put you much in mind of Headington, eh?'

Barrington smiled; Lord Dolph laughed, and Maggie giggled.

'Let me introduce you to my wife,' said Dolph. 'We were having a go at the rubbish-heap. Come, if this doesn't bang Europe, as Maggie would say, I'm blest. It's the Tyrol with perpetual vegetation.

Did you notice my bridge? I modelled it after the one at Headington. You must come out presently and see the yards. We are setting up pigs. I shall make no end of money out of my porkers; the selectors buy 'em. We're thorough bush people here. I go in for roughing it like one o'clock. It's not half bad fun; and there's excellent duck-shooting down the creek. Come inside and we'll open the post-bag. I believe there's an English mail due.'

Lady Dolph, with one shoulder awkwardly raised above the other, led the way into the sitting-room, which was pretty enough, though the walls were only canvased, and daylight might be seen between any two of the outer slabs, which stood apart as though they had not been introduced to one another. There was a curious application of English æstheticism to the rude arrangements and home-made furniture of the Australian bush. The wide fireplace was surmounted by an artistic

erection of polished cedar, crimson paper, and blue china plates. Roughly-carved brackets supported pots of Doulton and Vallauris ware. Engravings after Angelica Kauffmann and Bartolozzi, that might have been filched from the Headington corridors, and photographs of familiar English and foreign scenes, lined the walls. The canvas chairs were adorned with crewel-work done by Lord Dolph's sisters. An opossum rug lay before the hearth. Beneath the window stood a pine writing-table, furnished with equipments of oxidised silver. A grand piano filled up one side of the room, and was littered with music. Lord Dolph, with boyish pride, in a new toy, ran his fingers over the keys, and trolled forth in a fine tenor one of Sullivan's songs.

'Is it not a beauty?' he cried. 'There's not another instrument like it in Leichardt's Land. Headington sent it to me for a wedding present. We had a rare piece of work

getting it across the creeks. Maggie said she'd rather have had the money to spend on bulls; but she likes it better now that I've taught her to sing duets with me. She has as nice a voice as there is in the district, except old Ferris's daughter's — poor little girl!'

'Why do you pity her?' asked Barrington.

Lord Dolph touched his forehead significantly, and went on playing.

'It's in the family,' he added. 'The old man is as mad as a hatter, a snarling, discontented creature. Longleat's storekeeper; it's a mystery to me how he got the situation. *There's* a wife for a settler!' he whispered enthusiastically, directing Barrington's glance towards Maggie, who was sorting out the letters that had just arrived. 'Hand them over, old girl. I wish you'd take out this note I have written to Miss Longleat, and give it to Dungie.'

Maggie departed. Lord Dolph rose from the piano, stretched himself, and looked with a sort of sheepish inquiry at his guest.

'I dare say you are thinking that she wouldn't suit marble halls, dukes, and duchesses, and that sort of thing,' he said; 'but bless you! she'd go down splendidly if I were to take her home.'

'She is unaffectedly charming!' said Barrington, with more heartiness than he felt. 'I congratulate you.'

'Really now, I'm glad you like her, though I detest the notion that a man's wife, like his horse, must be subject to the criticism of his friends. I suppose that you saw my people before you left England?'

'Lord Headington went down with me to Southampton—he was very kind—but I saw none of the others.'

'He is a rare old sort is Headington,' said Lord Dolph in a constrained tone. 'Didn't Sir Lionel see you off?'

'No; Lionel and I never pulled over-well together. He is a prig, and my mother leads him by the nose. His wife is a fool. I think she would have taken my part if she dared. I disliked her, and she was sorry for me in my trouble. My mother, whom I worshipped, was hard as a stone.'

'I say,' said Lord Dolph, 'I heard about your mess. I'm awfully sorry for it. It's no use beating about the bush. My mother keeps me pretty well up in what is going on.'

'I suppose,' said Barrington, looking at Lord Dolph without blenching, 'that she told you how I had left the Guards.'

'I heard there had been a row. She wrote me some particulars. Women are never very clear in matters of detail.'

'Your mother and mine are old friends. They have thoroughly discussed my iniquities. You have had your information direct from head-quarters, and I have no doubt that it is correct,' said Barrington, bitterly.

'Look here, Dolph; the hardest cut I've ever had was my mother's conduct in that affair. You know what she is—how cold, and yet how fascinating. The head of the family is her god; if I had been the eldest son I should have been immaculate. I have always felt that she might have done with me what she chose. I hated the idea of coming out here, when she urged it—when she seemed anxious to get rid of me—I had no heart to resist. Now that I am here I don't know what I shall do. Do you think that I am the stuff to make a settler?'

'Emphatically no,' said Lord Dolph. 'You would have to take up new country, drive cattle, explore, and that sort of thing. You wouldn't stand it.'

'Then there is a poor prospect before me. I may trust you; your family has always been staunch to me. My brother allows me one hundred and fifty pounds a year, otherwise I have nothing. What can I do?'

'Why!' cried Lord Dolph, with his frank, hearty laugh, 'Maggie and I settled that when we heard that you were coming. You must marry Honoria Longleat, and become the owner of the great Tarrangella tin-mine.'

CHAPTER VII.

AN AUSTRALIAN EXPLORER.

SOME few days after the arrival of Barrington at Dyraaba, Mr. Dyson Maddox and his superintendent, Cornelius Cathcart, were riding over the ranges from Barramunda in the direction of Kooralbyn. The two stations, with Dyraaba forming the point of a triangle between, lay about fifteen miles apart, a convenient distance to be pleaded as an excuse for remaining the night when alluring attractions offered themselves, and not too far to be retraced late in the day when circumstances rendered return desirable.

Of the two men, the superintendent, as requiring the shortest notice, may be described first. He was small and spare, with a loosely-built frame, upon which his clothes hung as upon a peg; a yellow face ornamented by a tiny flaxen imperial, and narrow blue eyes. He was always shabbily dressed. At all times a restless imp seemed to possess his frame. When he walked, his body jerked convulsively; when he rode, his limbs twitched as though he were a victim to incipient St. Vitus's dance. His tone was caustic, and he affected cynicism. He had been Maddox's companion for several years, first in certain exploring expeditions on the northern coast which the latter had conducted, and afterwards as manager of Barramunda.

Maddox had upon one occasion saved Cathcart's life in a flooded creek, and this circumstance was sufficient warrant for the strong, undemonstrative attachment that ex-

isted between two dissimilar natures. Of late, however, a slight constraint had arisen in their intercourse. It was suspected by both, though not admitted by either, that this was due to Miss Longleat's influence.

Yet in what way was difficult to define. There could be no question of rivalry between the two men. Had there been, Cathcart would certainly have withdrawn in favour of his friend, while he would as certainly have cloaked his generosity under an appearance of snarling contempt. As it was, circumstances forbade him to think of matrimony. To aspire to the heiress of the Tarrangella Mine would have been ridiculous presumption. Cathcart would not acknowledge to himself that Honoria attracted him; but that she constantly filled his mind was evident, and that there was a latent bitterness in his thoughts of her was equally certain.

Dyson Maddox was broad-shouldered and

thick-set, with muscles like iron, and a skin mellowed by exposure to the colour of untanned leather. He had finely-hewn features, a determined mouth, and brown, level eyes. There was brusque daring in his glance, and much frank nobility in the sweep of his brow. He had a trick of frowning when preoccupied, which gave a morose expression to his face; but when the frown dispersed there was sweetness in his look. His hair curled in heavy locks, and his moustache and whiskers were carelessly trimmed, as though he were not accustomed to expend thought upon his toilette.

A typical Australian of the second generation, unconventional, courageous, and energetic; lacking somewhat the graces of society, but rich in an air of native distinction, and in the chivalry which arises from intuitive good breeding. He was far removed from the thin-skinned, metaphysical breed, and had none of that æsthetic sentimentalism which

is a development of Old-World civilisation. His passions were strong, but balanced by logical power and by the discipline of a hard life. He had a rare faculty for repressing emotion; was deliberate in action, and slow to receive new impressions. Though fairly cultivated, he had not followed intellectual pursuits more closely than the exigencies of a purely Australian career had demanded.

The master and the manager had been discoursing for some time upon bovine matters, when Maddox remarked, apropos of an arrangement for selling fat cattle during the winter: 'It is possible that I may not be much at Barramunda after the opening of Parliament. I am thinking of taking a more active part in politics this session.'

'So I imagined. Of course you have been offered the post of Minister for Lands. It seems the pet ambition nowadays to make one's self into a target for scurrilous attacks.'

'You take an unfortunate view of the question,' replied Dyson. 'Why should political distinction be an unworthy aim here? There must be interested motives underlying all party strife; they come nearer the surface in a small community. I have always wished to be in the Cabinet, but there are reasons which make me hesitate to accept the position. I must, however, let the Premier know my decision this evening.'

'But beforehand you must make yourself certain of your ground with Miss Longleat. I understand. This is the reason of your détour by Kooralbyn. I hope she will be there, and that you may catch her in a listening mood. That is the worst of having to do with capricious persons; there is no calculating their humours. Well, if you are successful in your suit, be good enough to apprise me as early as possible of the fact, so that I may clear out of Barramunda without delay.'

'You have always said that you would leave Barramunda when I married. Why should you do so? No one should interfere with you in the Bachelors' Quarters.'

'Not even the Bachelors' Quarters would be sacred to Mrs. Maddox,' answered Cathcart, shortly. 'Thank you, but there is not room at Barramunda for Miss Longleat and for me. I shall take up country out west, or go to Fiji, which seems the refuge for unfortunates just now.'

'I have sometimes fancied,' said Dyson in a hesitating manner, though he spoke with deliberate emphasis, 'that you were attracted by Miss Longleat. The thought has troubled me, although I have no actual grounds for entertaining it. I only guess at your feelings. You know my wishes. Come, hadn't we better have the matter out?'

'Make your mind easy,' said Cathcart. 'I am too good a servant to poach on my master's preserves. I may be a fool, but I

am not such a drivelling idiot as to suppose that Miss Longleat would think of me as a husband. An admirer is another thing; a chimneysweep may be at liberty to worship a goddess. I dare say that she is piqued because I have not thrown myself at her feet; but I have some self-respect. That girl puzzles me. I cannot make up my mind whether I dislike or pity her most.'

'Tell me your reasons for disliking her,' said Maddox.

'She is always posing for effect. There is nothing genuine about her except her greediness for sensation. She is an actress who believes in her parts. She is cold-blooded and passionate together. She is intolerably selfish; she has everything to make her happy, and she is morbidly discontented. She despises her father who adores her. She is not womanly. Then her frankness is extraordinary. She is essentially a New-World product. No European young woman

could combine so much boldness with an innocence which one is obliged to take for granted. Excuse me if I offend your susceptibilities; you asked my opinion.'

'Go on,' said Maddox. 'Now, why do you pity her?'

'She is absolutely solitary; she has neither women friends nor relations. As long as she cultivates fastidiousness, there can be no sympathy between her and her father. She has been badly brought up. What result could one expect from a Sydney boarding-school? And I think that there is a certain nobility in her nature. She will be either good or bad. She is discontented with herself. If she were wise she would marry you, but I do not think she will—just yet. Our roads separate here. I am going to meet Brown at Jaff's Peak Camp.'

'You'll not come on to Kooralbyn, then?'

'No; there are the weaners to be looked

after, and the long-tailed strawberry cow to be brought in. And I am not unselfish enough to play bodkin.'

Cathcart turned his horse, and with a curt good-bye galloped away through the trees, till he had disappeared over the brow of the hill. Maddox rode on through the silent forest, descending the range and skirting the creek, where the tall cedars, laden with the golden berries of autumn, cast their shadows over the tracks.

Dyson Maddox's grandfather had come out to Australia holding a Crown appointment in New South Wales. The office under a responsible Government had descended to the son, who, in his turn, had died suddenly before Dyson had attained his majority. Thus it will be seen that the lad was a true native of the soil. He inherited from his father an easy competence, and having neither brothers, sisters, nor near relations, had no claims upon his purse. But he was not content to plod

on in conventional fashion; he must needs carve his fortune in his own manner. It was his ambition to become one of the pioneers of Australian civilisation. He had made several more or less successful attempts to penetrate into the interior, and a few years before the present date had equipped and commanded an exploring expedition, which, with a dauntless energy seldom equalled in the annals of Australia, had fought its way through the heart of Leichardt's Land to a point on the extreme northern coast, hitherto only accessible by sea.

At the risk of starvation, and of murder by the hostile tribes, whose territories had never before been invaded by white men, the little band, with Dyson Maddox at its head, pushed on towards the northern peninsula. Half-way the horses perished from eating poisonous berries in a scrub; provisions failed, and sickness thinned the number. Nevertheless, the brave men pursued their

way on foot, through forest and desert, subject to night attacks and to daily peril of native ambuscades, till they reached the remote seaboard township of Gundaroo, a port commanding the northern waters, and a touching-place for mail-steamers of sufficient importance to render the establishment of land communication with the southern districts a matter of concern to the Leichardt's Land Government.

In the course of this expedition Maddox's left arm had been disabled by the thrust of a black's spear, hurled during a midnight surprise of his camp. He was almost a cripple when he reached Gundaroo. A few months later he knew that he could no longer draw his trigger with certainty of effect, or rely upon his physical strength to aid him in combating the dangers and difficulties which beset the path of an explorer.

Thirst after unknown country had been the ruling motive of his life. The miner who

digs in the expectation of striking a priceless nugget knows no keener excitement than that which Dyson experienced at the first glimpse of some broad river or fertile rolling plain, never before gazed upon by any but barbarian eyes, but which, by his discovery, might in future ages become the home of thousands of his race.

The abstract side of existence had few claims upon him, yet he was not without enthusiasm of an inspiring, practical kind, and was strongly imbued with the notion that he who places fresh territory at the service of his country has a no less exalted mission than the scientific investigator, the mechanical discoverer, or the pathological inquirer.

Now this wound, inflicted by the ignominious weapon of an aboriginal, had changed the whole current of his existence. He could no longer lead the life of perilous adventure which had held for him so great a charm. His health had been injured by exposure and

privation, and those anxious six months, during which death had stared him in the face, had visibly whitened his hair and perceptibly reduced his vigour.

He had left Leichardt's Town full of animal health and reckless bravery; he reached Gundaroo broken-down, subdued, and prematurely aged, his ambition checked in the very hour of fulfilment. There was nothing for him but to return south, and to embrace a tranquil, bucolic career, seasoned by the mild excitement of politics.

But when, after his purchase of Barramunda, he paid his first visit to Kooralbyn, and saw again Honoria Longleat, whom he had known as a child, now fresh from school, and radiant in the first consciousness of power and the bloom of early womanhood, he almost ceased to regret the life he had quitted. A vague, delicious dream, which had sweetened his wanderings, took defined shape, and imparted a new zest to existence.

Frank, daring, original, with the touch of passionate sensibility that he himself lacked, he felt that she was the one woman who could make his happiness.

But he was cautious and deliberate, and did not snatch the prize when it was, perhaps, within his reach. Honoria had her ambitious dreams of a life of colour and excitement. Sometimes he seemed to her cold and commonplace, sometimes unrefined. She began to mix in the world and to taste the sweets of coquetry. She accustomed herself to associate elegance of manners with an European education. As a slave or an adoring mentor, Dyson pleased her well enough, but she was almost convinced that he would not be a husband to her liking. Yet she was not happy when he absented himself from her society. She paid deference to his opinion: by turns she piqued and enthralled him, offended if he refused to dance attendance in her train, despising him for patient endurance

of her whims. So matters stood, but Honoria was not aware that he had given her a certain length of tether, and had determined to suffer these alternations of hope and despair no longer.

After an hour's riding Maddox crossed the river for the last time, and entered an extensive plain, commonly called 'the racecourse,' that lay between the creek and the hill upon which Kooralbyn was built. Now he passed through the slip-rails and was admitted into the home-paddock. Behind him rose the mountains, sloping in a series of wooded ranges to the plain. Herds of cattle and horses browsed upon the rich pasture, which was dotted with clumps of trees and bordered by a fringe of green that marked the course of the river.

The head-station of Kooralbyn consisted of a cluster of cottages built upon the hump of a low hill that overlooked the racecourse. Three of these buildings were placed in a

garden enclosed by a high fence, of which one portion was overgrown with passion-fruit, while the remainder supported a hedge of cactus. Round each was a wide verandah, partly trellised with vines, and festooned by bougainvillea, snowy stephanotis, and the orange, bell-shaped flowers of the begonia. The two smaller cottages, in one of which dwelt Mr. Ferris and his family, while the other was the kitchen of the establishment, were connected by covered passages with the larger house occupied by Mr. Longleat and his two daughters. Outside the enclosure stood the Bachelors' Quarters, set apart for the accommodation of passing strangers, and for the use of gentlemen stockmen, and *new chums*, of which, upon a large Australian station, there are often several.

The garden sloped in vine-covered walks towards the plain. At its foot lay a small silvery lagoon, with lilies, white and delicate

mauve, floating upon its surface. Beyond, in the distance, rose the amphitheatre of hills, some purple and shadowy, some grey and barren, prominent among them the Koorong Crag, to which Barrington's attention had been directed during his ride to Dyraaba.

The stockyards and outhouses were situated at some little distance from the cluster of cottages.

An avenue of bunyas, still in their youth, led from the stables to the back-entrance to the garden. Maddox rode straight hither, dismounted, and called:

'Hi, Cobra Ball!'

A black-boy, grinning from ear to ear, woolly-haired and red-lipped, approached at the summons, and took Maddox's horse.

'Ba'al Massa want em yarraman again to-day?'* he asked, in the curious vernacular ommon to half-civilised natives.

* Being interpreted, runs thus: 'Does the master want the horse again to-day?'

'Yes,' replied Dyson; 'this fellow go along a Kooya to-night. Keep him in the yard.'

'Youi,'* said Cobra Ball. 'Missee Honoria along a humpey. Missa Longleat ba'al at Kooralbyn; that fellow gone along a Leichardt's Town. You got em grog?' he added, with an insinuating gesture, as in taking off the saddle a flask dropped from Maddox's pouch to the ground.

'Look and see,' said the squatter, drily.

Cobra Ball eagerly snatched the flask, uncorked it, poured a drop of its contents upon his hand, which he smelled excitedly, then uttered an exclamation of disgust.

'Ba'al budgery white man gammon poor fellow like it that,'† he said piteously, and restored the flask to its former receptacle.

* 'Yes. Miss Honoria is at the house. Mr. Longleat is not at Kooralbyn.'

† 'It is not kind of the white man to deceive a poor black fellow in this way.'

Maddox walked down between the bunya-trees, and, opening a wicket-gate which led into the garden, quietly entered the enclosure. An air of inaction hung over the place. The two long verandahs facing each other were tenantless, save for the bright lizards that darted every now and then across the rough boards; and a large hound, lying under the shade of an orange-tree, lifted his head and yapped peevishly, but was too lazy to bark or stir. As Maddox let the gate swing back upon its well-oiled hinges, a child of six darted out from beneath the passion-fruit vines which covered the fence, and from which the purple eggs temptingly hung. Her face and hands were stained with yellow juice, which she vainly tried to wipe off upon her pinafore. She was a queer elf-like little creature, with a yellow, old-fashioned face, large black eyes, and dark-brown hair, that hung in a drake's-tail wave upon her skinny shoulders.

'Oh, Mr. Maddox, Mr. Maddox!' she cried in her thin voice; 'it *is* hot! I've been looking for a big green frog to put down my back and keep me cool. Do you think that you could find me one?'

'You little story-teller, Janie,' said Maddox, good-humouredly. 'Is anyone at home?'

'Mr. Maddox, we had the very last melon to-day, and Mrs. Ferris is making a tart for dinner; and Euphrosyne has got kittens,' affirmed Janie. 'She'll have to be called Old Phrosyne now,' continued the child with reflective wisdom, 'for the kittens is the new Phrosynes; and father has gone down to fight Mr. Middleton.'

'Is your sister indoors?' inquired Dyson.

'Little mother is in the front-parlour, or out on the verandah,' said Janie. 'Mr. Dyson,' she ended vehemently, 'I *wasn't* eating passion-fruit.'

'Janie, Janie,' called a woman's voice from the house.

'I'm coming, Aunt Pen,' cried Janie, and darted off in the opposite direction.

A middle-aged lady, in a spotless apron and a cap adorned with many ribbons, was rolling out pastry at the open window of the kitchen. She was a comely body with flaxen hair and round blue eyes, bright-complexioned and well-favoured, with an air of wishing well to all the world, and a little flutter irresistibly suggestive of a thickly-feathered Brahma hen, characterising her movements.

'Dear heart!' exclaimed she; 'why it is Mr. Maddox!' She gave him a rapid nod and continued the manipulation of her pastry. 'You'll stop for luncheon. It'll be a scrappy sort of meal; but whatever it is, I can't give ye any better, for they are waiting for that old man of mine to come back and see about killing a fresh

bullock. You haven't seen anything of him, I suppose.'

'No, Mrs. Ferris. I have come from Barramunda.'

'I hope he hasn't got laid up at Braysher's with the nasty grog they make him drink. Brandy and art together, are just the ruin of him.'

While Mrs. Ferris turned for a moment to admonish the maid-servant who was assisting her, Dyson made his way past the window, stepped on to the back verandah of the big house, as it was called, and tapped at the open door.

His knock remained unanswered. Ceremony is scant in the Australian bush, Dyson entered the sitting-room, which was evidently deserted, and paused, looking about for traces of its owner. The apartment was large and cool-looking, ceiled and lined with cedar, the darkness of which was relieved by white muslin curtains, and the many prints and

photographs which covered the walls. The floor was matted; an open piano stood in one of the corners, book-cases filled the recesses. Flowers bloomed everywhere; bowls of roses scented the air, and the wide fireplace was hidden by ferns. Newspapers and magizines littered the small tables. The room occupied the width of the building, and upon the opposite side the open French windows, festooned by creepers, framed lovely views of the plain and mountains.

'Who is there? Come in,' said a voice from without.

Maddox crossed the room, and was enchained for a moment by the charming picture which presented itself.

A very beautiful young woman reclined in a hammock, slung at the coolest and shadiest end of the verandah. Behind her was a trellis of vines, upon which a few late bunches still hung; a trailing withe of orange begonia touched her shoulder. Her head was bent,

and the light shining through the leaves upon her hair imparted to it a warm chestnut tint. She was dressed in light-blue muslin befitting the summer's day, and beneath its transparent folds the round lines and delicate indentations of her shoulders and bust might be traced. One hand supported her cheek; the sleeve had fallen back from her arm, and its shapely curves were half exposed. She was rather a Venus than a Diana. There was a suspicion of voluptuousness in her attitude, as, with her feet lightly touching the ground, she swayed herself softly to and fro in her hammock. A book was in her lap, on the ground beside her a basket of guavas. It was the incarnation of summer luxuriance and dreamy idleness.

She looked up with a pair of brown eyes at once *farouche* and enticing. He saw a clear-tinted oval, with a low forehead; a nose that would have been Grecian but for the faintest turn at its point, which gave piquancy to a

face that might otherwise have appeared too severely classical; flexible lips, moist and full, slightly disdainful when in repose, purely bewitching when they smiled; and an expression half-expectant, half-weary.

A soft evanescent flush overspread her face as she greeted her visitor with a little nod and a smile that must have assured him that he was welcome.

'I half thought that we should see you to-day. I hope that you are going to stay the night. I have been bored to death this week. I don't find my own company particularly agreeable at any time, and it becomes quite unsupportable when it is the only alternative to the Ferris' society.'

'I thought that Mrs. Ferris looked especially radiant just now.'

'She is always smiling, good soul! I dislike people who take an invariably cheerful view of life—they exasperate me. Have you been to Leichardt's Town lately?'

'I am on my way there now; I have only put up my horse for an hour or two, and must start again directly after luncheon.'

'Oh, tell Cobra Ball to turn your horse out, unless there is any special attraction. In that case I should be annoyed, for I am very jealous. I don't often stoop to entreaty, but you see that I am at my lowest ebb. Do stay.'

'I wish I could; but the fact is that I have an important engagement with your father this evening, and should not have come here, but that I wished particularly to see you. You have heard of poor Carey's sudden death?'

'Yes; papa hurried to town at once; but how can one keep posted in political news with a mail only once a week? Who will be the new Minister?'

'Mr. Longleat has offered me the appointment.'

'I guessed that you were the coming man,

though he was terribly close on the subject. Surely you don't hesitate. Of course you will accept.'

She looked at him with bright penetrating eyes, though she hardly abated the slow movement of the hammock in which she had again seated herself.

He leaned against the verandah-post and deliberately regarded her.

'I think so,' he replied slowly. 'On the whole, I feel it best that I should. Yet there are considerations that make me uncertain what to do. What would *you* advise?'

'Oh, how can you ask! Acceptance of course. I have imagined myself into a state of frantic excitement over the Railway question. I can imagine myself into most moods. There is no imagination, however, in my wish to see my friends distinguished and occupying as high places as it is possible for them to reach. I suppose there is a certain glory in

being a cabinet minister—even in Leichardt's Land . . . But tell me your views, and the reason of your hesitation.'

'I am not a man of wide political influence, and, on considering the matter, have thought that it might be more advantageous for our party if a less decided member of the squatting faction were chosen. It is a reproach against Longleat's Ministry that it is composed almost entirely of squatters. Every means ought to be taken to strengthen it—it is weaker than you suppose.'

'You are a prophet of evil,' said Honoria. 'Tell me how I can serve the cause. I will do anything short of marrying Mr. Middleton that is likely to promote our interests. But I think that you underrate your popularity. You are a great explorer. You have made a name. Surely you may consider yourself a pillar of the State.'

Dyson smiled sadly.

'I don't like you to speak in that way,' he

said gravely. 'It makes me fancy that you are laughing at me. I have done nothing out of the common. I believe that I could have made discoveries if my health had not failed me; and you touch upon a sore point when you allude to that Gundaroo expedition. The passion for exploring is still strong upon me. I sometimes think that I could face death to gratify it. But it is silly work experimentalizing upon one's self. I want now to become a political great-gun—it seems a petty ambition—I know that you despise it——'

'How do you know that?' interrupted Honoria. 'You would interest me immensely if you would set yourself to analyse my character, and tell me how far I am real and how far sham.'

'I wish that I knew,' said Dyson, earnestly. 'You are a very difficult person to understand.'

'Not to anyone who interested me suffi-

ciently to make me forget myself,' said Honoria, with a soft deliberateness which gave peculiar force to her words.

Dyson was about to speak, and glanced uneasily around, but Janie's voice was heard outside in rapid protesting colloquy with Mrs. Ferris.

Honoria went to the back verandah and said an admonitory word to the child. When she returned, Dyson was perfectly cool.

'I don't think anything of your objection,' she said, 'if it is so purely disinterested as that. I begin to look upon Mr. Carey's death as quite providential. Though you accuse me of a mock enthusiasm, I care sufficiently for the party to feel the importance of its being thoroughly cemented. Better a squatter than a half-hearted townsman. I am not above owning to personal motives for my advice. I have a selfish reason for wishing you to become Minister for Lands. You will be obliged to spend the winter in Leichardt's

Town. I want you to belong to my world, to live my life. I missed you terribly in Sydney last year.'

'Are you really in earnest?' exclaimed Dyson. 'I know that you are fond of pleasure — that you like new friends. I sometimes think that admiration is the breath of your life. You must have had your fill in Sydney. I could not hope that you had given me a thought.'

'Yes; I dare say that I thought of you every day. I am certain that I did so whenever I was particularly naughty. You have a way of showing your disapproval which amuses me. Your displeasure adds zest to wrong-doing.'

'And gratifies your sense of power,' said Dyson with bitterness. 'I am sure that is what you mean.'

'Perhaps,' said Honoria, provokingly; then added: 'And perhaps I cared, too, a little whether you were satisfied or angry with me.'

'Are you tired of Kooralbyn yet?' asked Maddox, abruptly.

'I liked it at first, but now the monotony stifles me. I ring the changes upon the various employments available—lounging in the verandah and garden, eating fruit, riding, walking, sleeping, and reading novels, till I am bored with all. The novels only make the dulness more unendurable, for they describe life to me as I have no chance of knowing it.'

'You mean the life beyond Australia?'

'Yes. This is only a state of half existence. Books are so unsatisfying. I read them greedily at first; then throw them aside in disgust. They never take one below the surface. There must be some deep experience, even here. Human beings are the same all the world over; only their surroundings influence them. What we know well seems commonplace. I would gladly exchange those mountains yonder for a tame

English meadow. At least I should be the richer for a new sensation. It's the same with the people I meet; their conversation, their ideas, are humdrum. I am weary of everything I see and hear. . . . .'

'Little mother,' interrupted Janie, running on to the verandah and standing on tiptoe, her hands clasped in excitement, 'Cobra Ball says that it is so cool and nice under the big apple-tree on the ridge; and I want some moss to stuff my doll's bed. Oh, do come! and Mr. Dyson can pull me some off the branches. Mr. Dyson, you've got nothing to do; come and help me.'

'Janie,' said Honoria, severely, 'you have been disobeying me. I forbade you to play with Cobra Ball.'

'Whop me!' cried Janie, striking a dramatic attitude. 'I didn't mean to be naughty, and make your heart ache, little mother. Whop me, and drive the devil out of me, and then we'll gather moss.'

Honoria took the child in her arms, and gazed fondly at the little dark face on a level with her own handsome head. The womanly softness of her nature seemed to have concentrated itself in her attachment for Janie. If her feelings could have been analysed, a strain of remorse might have been found mingled with her tenderness. She had vigorously hated the child's mother during the short lifetime of the latter; but at her death, one of those floods of reaction to which her nature was liable swept away her rancour and turned the tide of her impulses. There was within her too strong an instinct of justice to allow her to revenge her fancied wrongs upon an innocent baby. Janie's helplessness had appealed to the latent mother element in her bosom; and as the child grew older, it was observed that she was the only being to whom Honoria was demonstrative of affection.

'I will not whop you,' she said; 'that

would make my heart ache worse. Come, then, we will go to the apple-tree. Mr. Maddox, I really think that it is cooler out of doors than within. Will you walk with us to the ridge ?'

The opportunity for which Maddox had inwardly longed presented itself, and he eagerly accepted Miss Longleat's invitation.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ENCHANTRESS OF KOORALBYN.

HONORIA put on a straw hat which was lying on the verandah, and leading Janie by the hand, passed beneath the vine-trellis and through a wicket-gate on to the hill, which rose to a peak above the house, and sloped in wave-like mounds downwards to the plain. Here, in the shadow of the ridge, it was always green, and usually cool.

Honoria and Dyson strolled, side by side, to a little knoll over which a giant apple-tree extended its long branches, hoary with the

greyish-green moss coveted by Janie's childish heart.

'It's like black Solomon's beard,' cried the child, clutching at a pendent bough.

Honoria seated herself upon the bank, while Dyson filled Janie's pinafore with moss, and sent her to the gully to gather fringed violets before the blossoms closed at mid-day.

'But what for, Mr. Dyson?' cried Janie, insistently; 'what for do the flowers shut up when it is time for my dinner?'

'Ask Angela,' said Dyson; 'she knows all about the flowers. Now run away, and do not come back till we call you.'

There was a crisp determination in his manner which made the child look at him wonderingly; but she departed, and he was alone with Honoria. Though he seemed outwardly calm, his pulses were throbbing fast. She had all the sweet unconsciousness of a coquette. The little episode with Janie had filled Dyson's heart with fresh longing. A

woman incapable of love, he thought, could not have smiled so tenderly upon the child. The softened expression still lingered on her face as she idly plucked the violets which grew among the grass beside her, and heaped them on her lap. Presently she threw off her hat, and leaning her head against the rough bark of the tree, looked up through a screen of leaves to the blue sky above.

'This satisfies me,' she said, as though brokenly taking up the thought which had been in her mind during her previous conversation with Dyson. 'This contents me for a time. I have no poetic sympathy with nature. The flowers have no voice for me, as they have for Angela. I prefer intercourse with humanity. But there is a warm delight in such a day as this; in the humming of insects above and around me; in the flutter of the leaves as the breeze stirs the branches; in the feeling that every blade of grass is growing, and the smallest ant enjoy-

ing existence, that seems to still my unsatisfied longing for something different. I often come here with Janie when I am out of spirits, and I forget for a little while that I myself want to grow and live.'

Dyson knew not how to reply. He had fancied for a moment that her thoughts were travelling with his own; and now he found them far upon another road. The air-like barrier which always seemed to divide them had never been more keenly felt by him. She looked down and caught his wistful glance, meeting it with her frank smile, at once seductive and chilling.

He longed to know how much of her unconsciousness was genuine; but in some of her moods he found her quite incomprehensible: he could not penetrate the dramatic instinct, which in her temperament carried emotion to the pitch demanded by the part she was playing, but never hurried her beyond it.

'You said just now,' he exclaimed, 'that you wished me to stay in Leichardt's Town this winter—to be near you, to live your life. I know you too well to read your speeches literally, but I should like to find out how much you do care for my society. I have an idea that you are not quite as false to me as you have been to some other men, and that when you say gracious things to me—you do sometimes when you are in the vein—there is a grain of meaning in them.'

Honoria nodded.

'That is quite true. I look upon you as my best friend, though I know quite well that there are many points in which I don't please you. Perhaps if you liked me better you would not see my faults.'

'I should see no faults in you,' said Maddox, 'if you had the crowning virtue of womanly sensibility.'

'What!' she cried, 'you think me strong-minded. You are very much mistaken in

your idea of my character. I have no force of will whatever.'

'I think that you are cruel,' said Maddox, 'It gives you pleasure to see your fellow-creatures suffer.'

'In other words, I am a coquette. It would be more to the purpose if you said that men were fools.'

'The last time that I was here,' said Dyson, 'you were doing your best to make a fool of an unfortunate young man whom I sincerely pitied. May I ask how long it has been your habit to take midnight strolls with your admirers?'

'Oh, that has been rankling in your mind, and now you have come to scold me. Were you concerned upon my account or upon that of the unfortunate young man? Well, there will not be another opportunity for compromising Mr. Byng. That *tête-à-tête* by the lagoon finished his business. He is going to England in April, unless, indeed, he com-

mits suicide before the ship sails. Come,' she added, 'you must not blame me if I prefer being amused out of doors to being stifled within, in an atmosphere of prosiness and vulgarity. Is it my fault that Angela, poor child! does not interest me, that Mr. Ferris's rhapsodies irritate me, and that Aunt Pen's twaddle bores me? Can I help it if my father's habits and manners jar upon me? I am odious for saying this, but it is true. My nature is pitched in a different key to his; it may be higher or lower—I often think that it is lower. I hope that you are not shocked at my frankness, but surely we know each other too well to play at propriety.'

'I wish that you would always be frank with me. Let me know you as you really are—that is all I want. I can see that your temperament is at war with your companions and surroundings. You are fitted for a higher life—and your nature is so impression-

able; externals affect you deeply—that is your misfortune. But I am grieved to hear that there is a want of sympathy between you and your father. You are the motive of his existence.'

'Is that so,' said Honoria, softly. 'Poor papa! I don't deserve to be so much cared for. Yet,' she added thoughtfully, 'if his affection is anything more than pride in my appearance, and a general satisfaction in me as a possession which contributes to his sense of importance, he does not let me see it. I suppose that we are neither of us demonstrative of our feelings. He is very kind to me; it pleases him to see me well dressed, courted, and admired; he gives me plenty of money; he is indulgent of my fancies—but there it ends. I am only a part of his success—not of his inner life. He has educated me above his level; we have nothing in common. I cannot tell him what is passing through my mind, nor does he speak to me unreservedly

about himself; it is as though we had each something to hide. I have been alone ever since my childhood. But what is the use of troubling about me? You cannot make me either better or worse. Go on talking about yourself. I want to feel certain that you will be Minister for Lands.'

'Honoria,' said Dyson, while a sudden flame darted from his eyes, 'what should I care whether you were good or bad, so long as I could make you love me? It has been in my mind to speak for a long time; but I wanted to be more sure of you—and so I waited and watched, till I am ashamed of myself for hanging upon you like a dog; and now I have determined to do so no longer. Suspense is unendurable. The real reason why I am doubtful about accepting the appointment in the Ministry is because if I do so I must be brought closer to you. I should be on a continual rack. I could not escape from the sight or thought of you. If you

cannot love me it will be best that I should hide myself in the bush, or go out west and try exploring again.'

'That would be weak,' said Honoria, quietly. 'I had imagined you different; I thought that you were strong.'

A red flush passed over Dyson's face, and he did not reply for a moment.

'Very well,' he said. 'At least you shall not say that I am weak. I was right; you *are* a cruel woman.'

Honoria bent a little towards him, looked at him swiftly, then drew back against the tree.

'I don't want to seem cruel,' she said, 'but I must think.'

'It is not possible that you can be taken by surprise,' said Dyson. 'I have been for two years at your beck and call. You must have seen into my heart during that time. Sometimes you have been more than kind, sometimes indifferent. I have never felt

sure of you for a day—indeed, I have often doubted whether you *could* love. Strange to say, it is your very egotism which leads me to hope. I know that I have little enough to offer an ambitious woman like you, but I think that I understand you well enough to make you happy.'

'If I married you,' said she quickly, as she spoke breaking into pieces of different lengths a twig that she had picked up from the ground, 'I should live just the same kind of life; if anything it would be tamer, and I should have no new sensations.'

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Dyson. 'What do you mean?'

'I dare say that you'll think me a bold sort of girl,' continued Honoria, looking at him levelly with her large eyes. 'I don't know whether I am or not; but why should I not say what is in my mind? You doubt whether I have any capacity for loving. Perhaps not, but there is a kind of feeling

that I should like to know if it be possible. I have dreamed of it; I am sure that it exists. If I married you I should go on dreaming of it, but I should never know it. And yet, if it wasn't for that, I think I might be happy with you; it would be a placid, monotonous existence, but it ought to satisfy a woman. I am not easily contented. I am always wanting more—more than I have got. I have thought of it a great deal; of course I knew what you wished. I have sometimes fancied that it might be—now I am certain that it never can be. There is no use in talking of it.'

'Stay!' urged Dyson. 'You say that you have thought of it a great deal, but perhaps always from your present point of view. You have not considered that when a woman marries, all her interests, her thoughts, and feelings must change. She becomes quite a different person. It is the quiet, inward joy that makes her life complete.'

'No, no,' cried Honoria, 'mine would be utterly incomplete. I need passion, excitement. I have tried to look at the matter from another point of view; I have observed the married people I have met. They think themselves happy; their lives would suffocate me. I should hate my husband in the same way that I detest men when they make themselves ridiculous by falling in love with me; or if I did not hate him, I should merely tolerate him, which would be worse. There must be passions that are real, or they would not be written of in books and acted on the stage. Not that I believe in sentiment. To be sentimental is as bad as being humdrum; but I like the quick stirring of my pulses, the quiver which goes through my body when there is a crisis of emotion. What is the use of living unless one can gauge one's capacity for sensation?'

Dyson was silent for several moments; then he said very quietly:

'What you tell me decides my fate. I should be a mean-spirited creature if I tormented you any longer. Our lives must lie apart. I must scrunch out the thought of you, and school myself to indifference. I would not marry you as you are. You would always be hankering after what, with me, you could never have, and we should both be wretched. You are right. You will never love me. I give up striving to gain what is hopeless.'

His tone raised in her mind an uneasy suspicion of his desertion. His constrained utterance was the mask to deep agitation, but this she hardly realised. He had been her slave; she could not bear to release him. As she regarded him with the critical eyes of a possible wife she asked herself whether it were indeed well that she should let him go.

There was in his appearance and manner just those traces of hard living and rude

service, that slight roughness of feature and lack of delicate refinement in language bearing that jarred upon her sensibilities and made her less awake to the energy and reliability of his character, and the manliness and frank nobility of his expression. But for that troublesome fastidiousness which demanded an aristocratic brow, smooth hands, and European address, she might have acknowledged him as a lover of whom she might justly feel proud.

Honoria was neither more nor less than a woman. She bent forward, intercepting his glance till he was forced to meet her smile, and said coquettishly:

'You give me up very readily. I thought that you prided yourself upon your tenacity of purpose.'

'How little you know me!' he exclaimed bitterly. 'A definite aim I would follow for years; but there is something unmanly in the pursuit of a shadow. Your love is no

more to me than that; it is better that I should face the truth. After realising that you were capable of passion, I could not be content with the pale attachment that I know is all you can give me. To me cold kisses and lukewarm sympathy would be more insupportable than open dislike. But you think I do not suffer. You know nothing of the stabbing pain that has struck my heart, when on a sudden, as though by a flash of light, I have seen your indifference. But I comforted myself with the thought that I fared no better and no worse than any other man in my place. Now I feel that I must tear you from me, even though I bleed in doing so. Disappointment has always been my portion, and what does it matter if I die as solitary as I've lived? There are other objects in the world for a man besides loving and marrying. Do you remember a little photograph of yourself that you gave me before I went out on that miserable Gundaroo expedition? I

have worn it, in a locket hung on my watch-chain, ever since ; once it turned the point of a black's spear. That will show you how even as a child I cared for you. I hardly knew how much I loved you till I was stricken down with fever in the bush. I thought that I was at my last gasp. God ! it *was* lonely! You know what it must be—to die of fever and thirst out there. We had been for two days without water, and the men were all out searching. In my delirium I saw you standing beside me, with your sweet face bent over mine, and your long brown hair floating over your shoulders. It was like the vision of an angel. I could not die while you looked at me. You stayed beside me till the men came back. They had found a waterhole, and as I revived with the drops they poured down my throat, you vanished. After that I constantly thought of you, and though I'm not a man to believe in super-natural influences, I have always looked

upon that fancy of my sickness as a sort of omen that some day your life would be a part of mine. It's not to be so, and I'll make a fool of myself no longer. Shall I look for Janie ?'

'Stay a moment,' said Honoria. 'Janie is down by the gully, happy with her flowers. 'Mr. Maddox,' she added, her manner changing from coquetry to tenderness with one of those capricious alternations which were peculiar to it, 'I'm sorry that I grieved you. If you understood me better, you would know what I feel . . . It would be like giving up one's chances in a lottery when one was certain of holding the winning number—like one's heart stopping suddenly when it had been beating violently with expectation. If you would let us go on as we were before, for a time—I—I can't bind myself now—I want to see more of the world—of other people.'

'No,' said Dyson, 'we cannot go back. I

meant that our talk to-day should put us on a different footing towards each other. I have said my say. You have spoken what was in your mind. If your heart ever changes, I shall see it soon enough; but, as far as the future goes, I shall put from me all hope of making you my wife. If you want a friend, I'll be one to you; but I will try not to be your lover, and I'll keep away from you as much as possible.'

Honoria jumped up from the grass, her cheeks aflame; but at this moment nearer loving him than she had ever been in her life. But, as she watched him move away, she felt as though she almost hated him. He had placed her in a false position. He had made her feel humiliated and resentful.

She turned her back upon him, and walked hurriedly across the grass, calling Janie in sharper tones than were her wont.

The child ran to her sister, her pinafore and her tiny hands filled with wild-flowers, and

when she saw Dyson departing, cried loudly to him to return. But he walked determinedly on towards the stable, and bade Cobra Ball fetch out his horse.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FERRIS MÉNAGE.

MISS LONGLEAT lingered on the plain with Janie, till there was no probability of again encountering Mr. Maddox. When, a little after one, she returned to the house, the Ferris family were all assembled in the dining-room waiting her re-entrance in order to begin luncheon.

The old man had arrived from Kooya a short time before. He sat a little apart, with his hands clasping those of his daughter, who was kneeling on a low stool at his feet, while Mrs. Ferris, bustling about the table, asked discursive questions touching his trip to town.

Angela was slender and fair, with the appearance of frail health which is denoted by great delicacy of limb, waxen complexion, and violet stains beneath the eyes. She was barely seventeen, and looked still younger. Her features were of the purity of a cameo, her forehead low, and her eyebrows full and extremely arched. Her mouth, pale rather than red, was of almost infantine softness, the lower lip drooping in a manner which suggested weakness of character. Her grey eyes, lovely in colour and shape, had a blank abstracted gaze, and were at once dreamy and shallow.

'I am sorry to have kept you waiting,' said Honoria, returning with excessive coldness Mr. Ferris's greeting. 'After all, Aunt Pen, there was no need for you to trouble yourself. You might have had luncheon in your own cottage. Mr. Maddox has gone on to Leichardt's Town.'

It was tacitly understood that when Mr.

Ferris was at home the two families should dine apart; in company only when Miss Longleat entertained male visitors during her father's absence, and upon such occasions the Premier had stipulated that Mrs. Ferris should preside as chaperon to his daughter.

'You see,' whispered Mr. Ferris to his wife, with an air of irritated complaint, as Honoria laid aside her hat in an inner chamber, 'she does not want me here; she did not notice me; she treats me as if I were the dirt; she never shook hands with me.'

'You old fool!' said Mrs. Ferris, who had a brusque, cheerful method of disposing of her lord's grievances, 'when polished silver's the fashion, who cares for old gold? A girl that has just parted with her sweetheart hasn't got eyes for old folk. Well, go on about this Mr. Barrington. I'll believe in your opinion, Anthony; for, in spite of your blather about art, ye don't want for wits—the man is no ordinary new chum, that's certain.'

'Who are you talking about?' asked Honoria.

'My old man has picked up a kindred spirit in Kooya—an Englishman on his way to Lord Dolph's, and, as I say, no common new chum, if his story about the Guards is true. Things go by contraries out here. It was only the other day we sent a lord's son to the huts. Butchers and baronets—lords and loafers—it's all one. I'll just say two and two make four to balance my mind.'

'You have got a new book, Angel,' said Honoria, pointing to a freshly-bound volume in the girl's lap. 'Do you like it?'

'It is a translation from the German. I have not read it yet,' replied Angela, coldly.

'There's a little fib,' said Mrs. Ferris in a tone of good-humoured contradiction that grated upon Angela's nerves. 'Why, it's only a minute ago that I came in and heard you telling your father about the mermaids and water-spirits, and such like nonsense that

the book is filled with. Fie! you are too big a girl to heed such fairy-tales now.'

'Angela!' said Janie, pricking up her ears at the mention of fairy-tales, you said that you'd tell me about the spirits which float under the lilies on the lagoon. Nobody sees them but you, and you promised to put them in a picture, so that I can understand.'

'Come,' said Mrs. Ferris, 'and let us feed our bodies as well as our souls. There was no need to worry about my scrappy lunch; I never thought, Honoria, but that you'd have persuaded Mr. Maddox to stay. Why was he so anxious to be off?'

'He had business in Leichardt's Town,' replied Honoria, briefly.

'I am told that he is to be the new Minister for Lands,' said Mr. Ferris.

Honoria was silent for a few moments. Presently she asked a question about the political prospects.

'They say that the Ministry cannot last,'

said Mr. Ferris. 'The heavy floods inland will prevent many of the western members from reaching Leichardt's Town in time for the opening, and the numbers are so even that if the Opposition brings forward a motion of want of confidence it is an absolute certainty that the Government will go out.'

'You speak as though you wished my father to be beaten,' said Honoria, with temper.

'I'm not a party man,' answered Mr. Ferris. 'The convictions of most people lie in their pockets, and I'm not above the weaknesses of humanity. I had a fancy for being in town this winter, and your father could easily have put me into a Government sinecure, but he was too *honest* for that—ha! ha!'—Mr. Ferris uttered his disagreeable chuckle—and it's of small consequence to me whether he or Middleton are in power.'

'As for me,' remarked Mrs. Ferris, meditatively, 'I must pin my political faith on

something; and though I dare say it's very likely that the Premier is mistaken, I'd rather take him for my block than fashion my opinions at haphazard.'

Honoria ate her luncheon in irritated silence, and seized the first opportunity which presented itself of quitting the table. She was in a mood in which small annoyances jarred upon her, and she wished to take a quiet retrospect of the scene she had enacted with Maddox; just as a lover of the drama will re-read, in solitude, with keen delight a play, the performance of which has deeply interested him.

Mr. Ferris's mode of lapping his cream, which, indeed, resembled that of her father, interfered with the flow of her thoughts. She reflected that it would add considerably to her happiness if the Premier would for once depart from his political creed, and by rewarding Mr. Ferris's services with a Government post, remove him from Koor-

albyn. But he would be equally odious in Leichardt's Town. The old man's obnoxious presence was one of her minor sores; and she, in common with other inhabitants of the district, was at a loss to explain the link that connected Thomas Longleat with his storekeeper.

It was still more inexplicable from the undercurrent of jealousy which the utterance of some biting allusion or cynical remark on the part of Mr. Ferris continually betrayed.

Honoria had been at school in Sydney when, ten years before this date, Anthony Ferris, with his wife and child, had arrived in Leichardt's Land. Poor, and apparently friendless, he had made his way to Kooralbyn, and after an interview with Mr. Longleat, was immediately appointed storekeeper, at four times the rate of salary enjoyed by his predecessor. The act had always been quoted as illustrative of Longleat's disinterested generosity; but Sammy

Deans, a certain free selector upon Kooralbyn, who cultivated Byron and Shakespeare, and had established a vinous intimacy with Mr. Ferris, always shook his head mysteriously, and declared that he knew better.

Honoria had never coincided with the popular view of Mr. Longleat's adoption of Anthony Ferris. She was of the opinion that her father's bountiful impulses ought at least to be subservient to her antipathies. She disliked Mr. Ferris, rather for the reason adduced against Dr. Fell than from any assignable cause. The veiled animosity to which Longleat, pompous, self-engrossed, and in a manner liberal-minded, was blind, had been quickly made patent to her keener perceptions. She saw that he disliked her father, and more particularly herself; and resented as a personal grievance that, in spite of her frequently-expressed aversion, Mr. Ferris's society was thrust upon her in a way at which she was unable to take open umbrage.

In truth, he was not an agreeable old man. He was variable as the winds, sometimes morose and taciturn, at others garrulous and self-complacent, but always displaying that morbid vanity which is the peculiar attribute of unappreciated artists, whose ideal aspirations transcend the critical capacity of their age.

Mr. Ferris justified his failure by the self-gratulatory reflection that genius which misses the aim of circumstance, like steam that exhausts its energy upon the air, is no less the potential regenerator of the universe. He had painted pictures which no connoisseur would purchase, and which had never cleared the portals of a high-class exhibition. He had written poems combining fervid metaphor and stilted inanity, doomed to be numbered amongst the myriads of rejected addresses which represent the waste of so much nervous energy and the expenditure of so great an amount of vicarious emotion.

At the age of forty-five he had collapsed in a fit of despair, had thrown away his brushes and forsworn the exercise of his imagination, and had sunk into the apathy of disappointment as Thomas Longleat's store-keeper. He was embittered to the core, and often, when he was alone, would weep puerile tears over the miscarriage of his favourite ambition. Nevertheless ease was grateful to him. He had endured a hand-to-hand fight with starvation, and for the first few years of his life in Australia blessed the means by which he had acquired freedom from actual privation; but, as time went on, jealousy gathered like a slow volcano in his breast, and comparison of his own position with that of his patron was a ready goad to animosity.

Good Mrs. Ferris, incomprehending soul, knew nothing of the inward demon which devoured her lord, or if she guessed at its existence, laid it to the charge of her own shortcomings in not having presented him

with the son for which she knew he longed.

'My dear,' she would say to Honoria in one of her confidential moments—for her young charge Aunt Pen, as she was called, professed an unbounded love and admiration —'Mr. Ferris always had an extraordinary notion that his son and mine would set the world on fire. I don't know I'm sure what put it into his head, for I never laid claim to any remarkable ideas; my family were always steady, respectable folk, but the old fool would keep drilling into me that it was the combination which produced geniuses, till I fairly flew round in his face and said, "Bother your combinations and your geniuses. If ever I have a son, which doesn't seem likely, I hope he may be a dolt." It was flying in the face of Providence, my love, for the Almighty is not agreeable to having His works cut out for Him like the pattern of a gown. Never a son have I had, and Mr.

Ferris has been fain to content himself with a weakly slip of a girl who has no notion of anything except her painting, and her mooning ways.'

Upon Angela Mr. Ferris's hopes were centred. She was the apple of his eye, the joy of his life. He had brought her up in accordance with his own theories of artistic education, and the result had been a strange mixture of ignorance and premature knowledge. He had brought all external conditions to bear upon the development of her peculiar temperament; had, as he expressed it, 'cradled her in the lap of inspiration,' had allowed her to run riot with nature, and had from her childhood encouraged the free play of her vague poetic fancies. He would not permit his wife to teach her needlework or any ordinary feminine accomplishment, nor would he suffer her to be fettered by the conventional rules which from the hour of her birth govern a woman's existence. No re-

striction was placed upon her childish love of reading, and she was at liberty to roam as she would through the fields of strange fact and flowery fancy. Thus the child's mind was a storehouse of fairy legends and half-understood classical myths. From her youth she had been taught to regard her pencil as the interpreter of her inmost yearnings, and the vent for her exuberant imagination. She was solitary in her habits, and fond of wandering alone in the bush; but so greatly had her gentle ways endeared her to all with whom she came in contact, that even the most savage of the blacks who frequented the mountains would not have dreamed of harming or frightening her.

CHAPTER X.

HERCULES AND OMPHALE.

LATE in the afternoon of that day upon which Dyson Maddox had visited Kooralbyn, Mr. Longleat found himself crossing the Leichardt in the ferry-boat that plied between the north side and Emu Point.

As he had sat in the club after his office-work was over, Mr. Vallancy had entered, and had started a game of whist at five-shilling points. The man was flushed and unsteady. He had called for brandy and soda-water, had drunk freely, and had brought into the room an atmosphere of bickering and braggadocio

peculiarly obnoxious to the Premier. He had made several gibing political allusions, and had so far succeeded in ruffling Mr. Longleat's temper that the latter had left the club. He walked towards the ferry, and took his seat in the boat before he had quite decided whether he would call on Mrs. Vallancy or not. Inclination carried the day. Before he had reached the opposite side, his impulse had settled into resolve.

It was not Mr. Longleat's custom to make afternoon calls, and Mrs. Vallancy's neighbours were considerably surprised to see the huge white-clad figure enter the wicket-gate and tap gently at the half-closed venetian shutters of the drawing-room. The Premier always wore white linen in summer, spotless as though it had just left the hands of the laundress. He usually carried himself erect, with a visible swelling of his chest and elevation of his head, as though he had indeed the state secrets of an important colony in his

keeping. There was just a spice of ostentation in his bearing—of self-assertion in his walk. To-day his appearance was less pompous; he stepped more quickly; he looked a trifle sheepish. Without having actually analysed the nature of his attraction towards Mrs. Vallancy, he had honestly struggled against the infatuation that since the coach-journey had been gradually intensifying, and felt himself guilty of a moral lapse in voluntarily placing himself under its influence, in the same manner that the drunkard, supremely conscious of sober intent, resists for a time the fatal glass, and at last yields, trusting to the shreds of self-control left him to bind him against committal.

Mrs. Vallancy, sitting alone in her drawing-room, observed the Premier's approach, and herself admitted him. As soon as he saw her face, Longleat felt certain that she had been weeping. To-day she was clad in white, and wore a yellow rose in the front

of her dress; her voice was subdued and melancholy.

She took Mr. Longleat's rough hand with her soft, ringed fingers, and led him to a seat of cushioned gilt wicker-work, ill-suited enough to the Premier's substantial form. The room was full of dainty knickknacks—small tables, Japanese screens, and cabinets, and expensive ornaments such as might readily form part of a collection of keepsakes. A rich yet faint odour exhaling from a bowl of creamy magnolias pervaded the apartment. The green jalousies were partially drawn, and the room was dim and cool.

'You have remembered me,' said Mrs. Vallancy in joyful tones. 'Good things sometimes come when they are sorely needed; a visit from you is one of them. I'm not very well to-day—a headache—that is always a woman's excuse when she is cross or unhappy.'

'I am afraid that something is troubling

you,' said Mr. Longleat, destitute of the fine tact which observes but does not remark.

'And if there were,' she replied, in a tone more pathetic than ungracious, 'who would care?' She walked to the window, lifted the jalousie, looked out, plucked a rose with which she toyed, and returned. Seating herself on a low chair close to her visitor, she leaned her chin upon her hand and regarded him, with a queer, inscrutable gleam shining in her dark eyes. '*You* care, she said presently, 'perhaps—a little.'

Mr. Longleat wiped his face with a silk pocket-handkerchief. His heart throbbed with pity, and with a generosity which he dared not proffer. 'Tell me what's the matter,' he said.

She shook her head in a deprecatory manner, but still led him on.

'I can't bear to see it,' continued Mr. Longleat, hurriedly, taking her hand in his. 'It—it goes agen me, somehow. A woman

like you ought to be kept from fretting and worry. You're one of the prettiest creatures God ever made; it's only right that you should be wropped round with riches, to hinder the hard things of life from knocking agen you and hurting you. . . . . Tell me, is it—is it money?'

She gave a little nod, then wrenched her hand away. 'It isn't all,' she said; 'not all, or half. . . . . And what is the use of telling you? It won't make you think any the better of me, or like me any the more. I dare say that you'll despise me in your heart for speaking about my troubles to a stranger like you.'

'Don't call me a stranger,' said Longleat, earnestly. 'I'm a plain-spoken man, and I go at a thing straight, without beating through the bush. Look here, Mrs. Vallancy, if you'll let me call myself your friend, you'll find that with me the word means a good deal. I'm proud to think that you've honoured me so far with

your confidence. You needn't be afraid of speaking out; it—it grieves me to see you unhappy.'

'Yes, I am sure of that,' said she, gazing earnestly into his face. 'If I had not thought so, should I have talked to you as frankly as I have done—all along? Your heart is so large, so noble, that you can find room in it even for me. You can feel for my troubles almost as you would feel for those of your daughter'—Mr. Longleat reddened, but she maintained an innocent composure—'isn't it so? It comforts me to think that some one cares for me a little. You have heard about me—about my husband,' she went on, with her eyes downcast upon the matting. 'You know the sort of people we are, or, rather, the sort of people that we are taken to be. You can guess the kind of life I lead—no, you cannot guess half or quarter of its wretchedness—and you would despise me if I told you.

. . . . You know that we are deeply in debt; that he gambles—drinks; that he is often cruel to me. The burden of all our misery falls on my shoulders. That was what I meant when I said that I could be happy if he were sent away out of temptation—if he could be sent to a place ever so far north. . . . . He would go — he wants money—and I should be left here. He would not be so cruel as to make me accompany him; he knows that a hot climate is almost fatal to me. I should be justified in refusing. . . . . And then I should be free. Oh, think what that would be to me! I should be spared harassing scenes—daily worry, I should have peace.'

'Yes,' said Longleat slowly, and pausing between his words. 'If—if there were—such a place—that he could be sent to.'

'There is,' she whispered, looking at him eagerly; 'there is—Gundaroo.'

Longleat blenched. He shifted uneasily

in his chair, and sat silent, his eyes upon the ground. She went on, in calmer, silvery tones:

'Don't think that I have asked for it. . . . I have no right—the boon would be too great. And you may only despise me. It seems terrible to wish one's husband to go away—I should not dare to let him know it. I am a hypocrite—I am selfish and heartless—but I long—oh! I long for rest. Truth is harder to face than the worst which one's imagination can picture. I'm a cowardly woman; I quail before rough usage. I like tender care, and soft words, and delicate clothes, and of all these my life is barren. I never loved my husband—why should I not say so to you?—and he knows it. I was compelled to marry him; and now I am paying the penalty of my weakness and folly.'

'You must not blame yourself,' said Mr. Longleat. 'You've been sinned against,

and cruelly used. I left the club just now because your husband came in, and I could not sit comfortably in the same room with him. If I feel like that, what must it be to you? It's a sin that a girl's married misery should be borne only by herself—and then that it should be thought a shame for her to speak! How is it possible for an innocent, trusting creature to tell a bad man from a good one? Her father should look after that. Do you think,' he added, and he trembled as he spoke, 'that I could rest easy in my grave if I had knowingly let my girl marry to her wretchedness? God forgive me all sins, but never that one if I'm like to commit it.'

'It mightn't be your fault altogether,' said Mrs. Vallancy. 'Your daughter might be wilful—you don't know. I was wilful always. It wasn't entirely because of my father and mother. I thought, as they did, that I should be rich, and live at ease—you see, I don't wish you to think me better than I

am—and I am punished; heaven knows that I am poor enough now.'

'What's money, after all?' said Longleat. 'What's the good of it but to make the people one loves happy? I've got plenty. That is the light in which I look at it. . . . And that is what I meant when I said that there might be ways of helping you. If you would accept a loan from me—to relieve you from your difficulties and put you straight—it 'ud be nothing to me.'

'We shall never have any money; it would be impossible for us to repay you.'

'But friends—you said that we were friends,' stammered Mr. Longleat—'and there needn't be any question of that sort. It's what I've done scores of times for pals on the road—and you——'

She laughed softly.

'Friendship does not often imply a partnership in purse. No—no. Don't talk of a loan. I understand you. You have a generous heart.

Another woman might have been offended. I am not—but it wouldn't do. You can't serve me in that way. Believe me, that I am most grateful for your sympathy; it warms and comforts me. Now, let us drop the subject of my troubles. I have said too much. I forbid you to mention them again. Tell me about yourself—about your daughter. I am jealous of her—I envy her.'

'Why?' asked Mr. Longleat, in surprise.

'For the reason that we are both women. Has she not everything that I lack? Beauty—ah! you need not shake your head. If I was pretty once, I know that I am prematurely old and faded now—love, admiration, wealth; and above all, has she not *you*—a father who adores her?'

'You're right there,' said Mr. Longleat, speaking with rough earnestness. 'I worship the clothes she wears—the ground she treads. That's about it. I only value what I am and

what I've got, according by what I am able to do for *her*. And yet—it's a queer thing—I don't mind saying it to *you*, but I could not say it to anyone else—least of all to her—something in my throat 'ud stop me. Women aren't the same . . . For all that, it's true. I love her as I love my life. I've told myself, when I've done a good day's work, "It's to make a lady of Honie." She's not like her father. I've meant that she should grow up different. There's sorts and sorts. I'm one sort, and I've educated her to be another; I've prepared myself for it—but, Lord! for all that, it's hard. I couldn't talk out to her as I'm talking to you now.'

'No,' said Mrs. Vallancy, in a tone half-sympathetic, half-interrogative.

'It's true. I'm not one to growl over the crop I've sown, but it's a trifle hard when a man can't reap his own harvest.'

'You mean,' said Mrs. Vallancy, 'that your daughter will marry?'

'I'm prepared for that,' said Longleat. 'If she marries to my mind, I'll not complain at losing her. All I ask is that I may be able to cotton with the man she's set her heart on. I'm pretty quick at seeing the wrong side of human nature. I know a pair of honest eyes when they look into mine. And her husband must be an Australian. She owes it to the country that has given her her money, and that has made a man of her father . . . Her marriage wasn't what I meant. There's a kind of wall between us that seems to grow thicker as she grows older—and we can't either of us climb it. She's a lady with ladies' ways. I'm nothing to her but a rough beggar that has knocked agen the world and doesn't understand her. She's stand-offish, and I'm huffed—and so it goes on; and for all my love, we grow farther apart . . . You see I'm telling you my troubles now.'

He sat silent for several moments, with a harassed look upon his face. She moved a

little closer to him, and laid her hand upon his.

'It's different with you,' he said. 'You seemed to be my friend somehow from the first. I ain't shy at speaking to you. As I said before, what is money between friends? Or if you would let me arrange matters with your husband. . . . He does not like me, but I do not think that he would make any difficulty about accepting a loan from me.'

'No, no; that would be impossible,' she said; 'we could never repay you,' she repeated.

'You hurt me,' said Longleat, 'when you talk about repayment. It is as though your pride wouldn't let you accept anything from a rough fellow like me. That's how I take it.'

'Indeed, you do me injustice,' cried Mrs. Vallancy, warmly. 'I thank you with my whole heart for your noble offer. Let me accept your friendship, your sympathy, which

are sweet indeed to me, but let the other matter rest.'

She rose, and moved to the window under pretext of raising the blind, but in reality to avoid following up the turn which the conversation had taken. In truth, she was anxious that he should not at that moment divine how far upon some future occasion she might be ready to avail herself of his generosity.

Mrs. Vallancy walked out to the verandah, and then returned.

'My husband will soon be coming back,' she said.

'I had better go,' said Longleat, feeling that he was dismissed. 'I shall see you at the Opening of Parliament,' he added, still lingering.

'No; I shall not be there.'

He pressed her for the motive of her absence.

'Since you will have it,' said she, 'a

woman's reason. Why do women go to raree-shows. To wear new gowns. I have none, therefore I shall stay at home.'

'Is it really so?' asked Longleat, looking incredulously at her slim, white-robed figure.

'Yes, truly. I owe Madame Sophie already more than I can pay her. I may tell you this, since I have refused to borrow your money. Now, good-bye.'

Longleat shook hands with Mrs. Vallancy and departed.

Some days later, a covered box was brought over from the north side, and left at the Emu Point cottage, accompanied by a note, in which Madame Sophie expressed her willingness to execute any further orders with which Mrs. Vallancy might favour her.

Upon opening the box, Constance found that the costume which she had coveted was placed at her disposal.

* * * * *

When residing in Leichardt's Town without his daughter, it was not Mr. Longleat's habit to dine at The Bunyas. He was a man to whom masculine society afforded greater pleasure than any other, and though he neither drank nor smoked, making indeed a merit of the abstinence which he affirmed had contributed largely towards his success in life, the roystering conversation of the smoking-room, and the political element which pervaded the club, was better suited to his taste than the more refined atmosphere of drawing-rooms.

But, upon the evening of his visit to Mrs. Vallancy, he departed from his usual rule, and, oppressed by an unaccountable sense of blankness, he ate his dinner at home in musing solitude, then retired to his study, where he surrounded, but did not occupy, himself with letters and books.

Never had his home appeared more devoid of companionship: never had the lack of

sympathy in his life forced itself more strongly upon him. He would have given much to hear the sound of Janie's prattle—to be conscious of Honoria's sweet, if somewhat disdainful, presence. The current of his daily interests and ambitions seemed to have been suddenly checked, and he felt himself to be stranded helplessly upon an unknown shore.

He was vainly trying to concentrate his attention upon some official papers, when the door was opened, and the entrance of Dyson Maddox furnished an opportune stimulant to his jaded energies. The Premier greeted him warmly; it was evident that the young man was a favourite.

'I am afraid that I am very late,' said Dyson. The Kooya coach was behindhand this evening. I looked into the club expecting to find you there.'

'I was obliged to go over some of Morrison's work, and could do it better here; but I am not in the humour for poring over

papers this evening. You got my letter, of course, and you have come down about the "Lands" appointment?'

'Yes,' replied Dyson, 'I have been turning the matter over in my mind ever since I heard from you. I dare say you will wonder that I should have given it a thought, except to feel gratified at the honour you have done me. I am most sensible of that; but the fact is, there were both public and private reasons. Are you sure that I am the man for the place?'

'Not a doubt of it,' said the Premier. 'I have always had my eye upon you as a likely member of the Cabinet. The screw is not a primary object with you. We want independent men. Lycombe and Brown were thought of, but they are free lances, and we are at odds upon the Abolition Bill. It might have been a wise precaution to nail one of them just at this turn of affairs, but there would have been a split later. The

other Ministers think with me. *You* are bound to stand and fall by our party, and you are fitted in every way for the office of Lands. I hope that you have made up your mind to accept.'

'Yes, I have done so. I have put aside all private feeling in the matter. I came down by Kooralbyn to-day, and saw your daughter. You know what my hopes were, and you were good enough to encourage them. It is only fair to tell you that they are now at an end.'

'What!' exclaimed Mr. Longleat, looking up with an expression of concern. 'Honoria has refused you! You don't mean to say so! I could have sworn that she was fond of you. She is a flirt, is Honie, and likes to be admired; but I had my reasons for believing that you were the man she had set her heart on. This is a blow to me, Dyson. I don't understand women. I own that I can't make out my daughter.'

'Perhaps I ought to say that some men might not have considered her refusal hopeless. She told me that she could not love me; that she required excitement, passion, neither of which she could find in me; that she wished to see more of the world, and half suggested that I should give her six months in which to make up her mind. I think she has some regard for me, but that is not the fashion in which I must be loved. If she has dreams of this kind, it is better that she should seek their fulfilment. My wife must not come to me half-hearted.'

'Pooh! pooh!' said the Premier, visibly relieved. 'You cannot expect such a prize as Honoria to drop like a ripe cherry into your mouth. Women won't answer at once to the bit, they must be coaxed and humoured. You mustn't give up so quickly. I thought you had more pluck.'

'It is at an end,' said Dyson, grimly. 'I shall never try again unless your daughter's

mode of thought changes entirely. She is restless and dissatisfied. She wishes to see life. Take her to England, Mr. Longleat. Let her have her fill. Throw her into intercourse with men of the upper classes, and give her an opportunity of choosing a husband to her taste. If she returns unmarried, it will be time enough for me to resume my suit.'

'By ——!' interrupted Mr. Longleat, fiercely, 'I have seen enough of Englishmen and of their doings. My daughter shall never marry a cursed aristocrat. She is the fruit of a free country, and in it her lot shall be cast.'

'If she will have it so; but she has a will of her own,' said Dyson. 'You have cultivated her intellect and perceptions; you have made her what she is. It is out of your power to control her likes and antipathies. Well! the subject is not a pleasant one for me. As far as I am concerned, let it drop. Now I want

to show her that I am brave enough to live in her world without flinching from the pain of association with her interests and pursuits. I gratefully accept the appointment. It gives me an opportunity for which I have wished. I'll make the necessary arrangements with Cathcart, and take up my abode in Leichardt's Town for the winter.'

Then followed a political discussion which lasted long into the night, and through which it is not necessary to carry the reader.

CHAPTER XI.

ANGELA.

AS Mr. Ferris had predicted, Barrington found existence at Dyraaba very monotonous. A week after his arrival he had almost decided with Lord Dolph that he was not of the stuff to make a satisfactory settler, and was casting about in his mind the possibility of obtaining a Government appointment by means of the interest which his family-name and connections would certainly procure for him. But opposed to this course was the unadvisability of disclosing more of his immediate antecedents than was necessary. The story

of his retirement from the Guards could hardly be revealed in its nakedness, and would deepen in disgrace from the mystery in which it was shrouded.

The episode, which hinged upon a beautiful woman well-known in the London half-world, and on a money transaction in which, to do him justice, Barrington had been merely a victim to the knavish rapacity of others, was discreditable more from the social than the moral standard of culpability. Society must needs have a scapegoat, and in this instance Barrington had suffered a more severe punishment than he perhaps deserved.

Going to Australia had seemed an easy and efficacious mode of self-effacement; but his English experiences had hardly been of a nature to fit him for the rough actualities of a colonial career. With good looks, a pleasing address, and the prestige of high birth, he had possessed an *entrée* to the best European society. He had idealised epicurism,

and had lived for the indulgence of refined sensation. Life to him was something more than a happy practical joke, a combination of the labouring and Bohemian phases of existence, into which, by means of Swiss bridges, sport, pigs, the piano, and stretches of the imagination, a faint flavour of the pursuits of an English country gentleman might be introduced.

It was humiliating to have forced upon him the conviction that his super-sensuous dreams of feminine excellence must henceforth remain unfulfilled, or take shape in—a Maggie; and that his æsthetic philosophy, which had reduced life to the level of artistic sensation, must in future be fed upon the excitement of cattle-hunting, the beauties of primeval nature, and the unrefined companionship that had as yet presented itself to him, and which was only endurable because it lacked the pretension of vulgarity.

One morning Lord Dolph, with a faint

perception that his friend was bored and an amiable desire to further his matrimonial projects, proposed a ride to Kooralbyn. It was arranged that Maggie should accompany them, and that they should remain a few days. However, an hour before the time fixed for starting, as Barrington was packing his valise and mournfully regarding the crushed condition of his white shirts, Lord Dolph entered, excited and apologetic :

'My dear fellow I am awfully sorry, but I am really afraid that I must give up the expedition to Kooralbyn. Ward, the butcher, has just turned up from Barramunda. He wants to make up a mob of bullocks, and I've got twenty fat uns ready for the market. Couldn't lose such a chance of selling. Mag and I must help to drive 'em in. Perhaps you wouldn't mind going without us. Maggie will pilot you over the ranges on her way to the Blue Gum Camp ; then you have only to follow the river ; you can't lose your way.'

Lady Dolph, who was in the sitting-room, giggled.

'Oh, no fear!' cried she. 'Come and saddle your horse, Mr. Barrington, and we'll be off.'

Lady Dolph looked very colonial in her short grey riding-habit and straw hat, under which her rosy, freckled face glowed with health and good-humour.

'I'll meet you round by the Boomerang Waterholes,' she said, in farewell to her husband. 'We must fly sharp,' she added, as she whipped her horse into a canter, 'for Dolph is so green about the stock that he'll be selling the wrong bullocks if I don't look smart after him.'

As he followed Lady Dolph Bassett's lead across the interminable ridges, Barrington reflected upon the advantages which a squatter would derive from marrying a wife who would 'look smart' after both her lord and his cattle.

'I suppose all Australian ladies ride well, and that sort of thing,' he remarked, pursuing a mental train of thought. 'Is Miss Longleat, for instance, clever about stock-keeping?'

'Honoria!' cried Lady Dolph; 'gracious, no! She is much too fine to go out on the run. I dare say that she would not know a strawberry beast from a roan, if you asked her. But then you see she was educated in Sydney, and her father has always had lots of hands. She was not brought up to the saddle as I have been. But when a squatter lives ever so far up the Ubi, and his men go on the burst, what can he do but make his daughters help?'

Barrington had still further food for reflection, and Maggie continued:

'She'll be more your style, Mr. Barrington. She is English in her ways. She makes up to be European. You don't care about Australia; I can see that in a twinkling.

Now Dolph likes the fun of it. Then he's different. It's rough in the bush, but it is not a bad sort of life. I dare say you think that I am rough too, but I'm pretty smart if I like; and if Dolph were to take me home I bet I'd soon pick up English manners. I've heard people say that is the beauty of Australian girls, they can turn their minds or their hands to anything.'

She escorted him to the river-bank, advising him to follow the course of the stream till he should arrive at a paddock-fence, which was near the crossing at Kooralbyn. Then she uttered a frank 'Good-bye; don't get bushed;' and trotted off to superintend the stock-collecting.

Not trusting himself out of sight of the green line which marked where the river ran, Barrington rode slowly along its windings. He passed beneath glossy chestnuts and spreading cedars, now beside murmuring shallows, and now by deep, mysterious pools,

bordered by beds of fern and arum and crossed by fallen logs, against which lay heaped the refuse left by many a flood. The trees closed him in, meeting high above his head, and upon all sides seemed to diverge in interminable vistas. Sometimes a dip in the hills or a break of foliage would reveal a glimpse of distant mountains.

Occasionally a deep gully intersecting the creek would oblige him to make a circuit, till he found a passable spot; or a sideling that afforded no foothold for his horse would necessitate a descent into the bed of the creek, where every now and then he would become bogged in a treacherous quicksand. But the sure-footed animal he rode, although unshod, was well-accustomed to rolling stones and slippery places, and would have found its own way to Kooralbyn without much guidance on the part of its rider.

At last Barrington reached a two-railed fence which sank on both sides into the

water, and finding no outlet, followed it up to a set of slip-rails which admitted him into a paddock, whence in the distance he could perceive signs of habitation.

A herd of unbroken horses lifted up their heads as he passed, and with their long manes and tails flowing, scampered towards a belt of scrub that lay between the creek and the wooded ranges beyond it. Barrington rode along a bridle-track that presently brought him to a well-worn crossing. Below him, there was a sweet murmuring of running water over a pebbly bottom, and the river divided itself into several narrow streams, merging lower down into one deep pool. Large crystals lay in the rocky bed, and a ti-tree, rising from the centre of an earth-girt stump at the junction of two rivulets, resisted the current which swirled and eddied round its bare roots and pendent foliage. Upon the opposite side stretched the wide plain of Kooralbyn.

It was a pretty, secluded spot. The creek-sides rose high and shelving, and were overgrown with mulgam plants now past fruiting, ferns, and a stiff green grass, of which the yellow bloom emitted a powerful aromatic perfume.

As Barrington let his horse drink, his eye wandered aimlessly along the banks, and a little distance down the stream were attracted by the flutter of a white dress through the trees.

A girl poised lightly upon a slippery log, which spanned a pool deep enough to render the prospect of immersion sufficiently alarming. She appeared to hesitate whether or not to advance, nervously drawing back her foot and clutching at the swaying branches of a wattle-tree that overhung the narrow bridge.

He saw that she was very young, hardly more than a child, and that she was also very pretty. The sweet helplessness of her face, and its dreamy, poetic expression, immediately interested him. He slipped off his horse,

and hanging its bridle to a stump, walked along the bank to the girl's assistance.

'Are you afraid to cross?' he asked, with gentle courtesy. 'The log is rather slippery. Let me help you.'

Angela turned her large blue eyes upon him, and a flush overspread the waxen paleness of her skin. 'Thank you,' she said simply, 'I want to go home. I have often crossed here before, and it is the first time I have ever turned giddy; but just now I saw a snake in the water, and it startled me so that I feared I might fall.'

'It was a water-snake perhaps,' replied Barrington. 'Can you see it still?'

'No,' answered Angela, and looked at him with her blank, appealing eyes. 'It might have been fancy. I sometimes do imagine that I see things which are not real. I had been reading'—she paused a moment, with her gaze fixed upon the water, and murmured, almost under her breath:

'"The serpent's mailed and many-coated skin
Shone through the plumes its coils were twined within."'

Barrington glanced in surprise at a little green volume she held in her hand.

'You have been reading!' he repeated. 'My child, do they feed your poetic cravings upon such strong food as "Laon and Cythna"?'

Angela looked bewildered. 'It is beautiful, is it not?' she said. 'I am glad that you like it too. I did not think that anyone in Australia cared for poetry except Father and myself.'

'Ah!' said Barrington. 'So, then, life in Australia is not all prosaic. Surely the voice of poetry echoes among these mountains. Shelley might have sung of the wild beauty of your forests.'

'You love them?' cried Angela, her face brightening to enthusiasm. 'Oh! so do I. I am never unhappy when I can wander among the trees and by the river. They

tell me so much—so much that other people do not know. . . . . But Mrs. Ferris would like best to pen me within doors, and teach me to do needlework.

'Mrs. Ferris is your mother?' asked Barrington.

'She is not my mother,' replied Angela, with a pettish accent. 'My own mother is dead. Mrs. Ferris does not understand me. She thinks me foolish. But my father says that an artist is never comprehended by the outside world, and so I shut my lips, and dream and live my inner life—that is all one need wish for.'

'I am gratified at your speaking to me so unreservedly,' said Barrington, with the wish to test her.

Angela directed a swift glance at his face, and coloured again.

'*You* are not like the others,' she said simply. 'When I saw you walking towards me I felt that I might trust you.'

'I have heard that you are an artist,' continued Barrington. 'I should very much like to see your drawings.'

'They are only studies,' said Angela; 'thoughts that rise in my mind and that I must express. By-and-by, my father will take me to Rome, and then I shall paint great pictures.'

'Poor child!' he murmured involuntarily.

'Why? You think I shall fail?' said Angela, sharply.

'No,' he replied. 'You may have genius.'

'Yes, I have genius,' she answered, with a confident simplicity. 'I am certain of it.'

'Genius is a rare heritage,' said Barrington. 'I hope it may be yours. When I see your paintings I will tell you whether or not I believe that you possess it. Come, give me your hand; I will lead you across the log, and you shall guide me to Kooralbyn. I have not told you my name yet; it is Barrington, and I am a friend of Lord Dolph

Bassett's. I have met your father at Kooya.'

'Oh!' said Angela; 'you are the Englishman of whom he spoke.'

'Probably. You can tell me whether Mr. Longleat is at the station?'

'There is no one there,' replied Angela, 'except my father and Mrs. Ferris. Miss Longleat is in Leichardt's Town.'

The pang of disappointment which Barrington certainly experienced was mitigated by the prospect of this innocent being's society. He took her hand and piloted her across the log, then returned, got on his horse, and rode through the shallow water to the opposite bank; here he dismounted and walked on by Angela's side.

'Are you always alone in your rambles? asked Barrington. 'Have you no companions?'

'I have my father and the birds and the flowers. I want no others.'

'Does not Miss Longleat ever walk with you?'

Angela shook her head and smiled inscrutably.

'Tell me,' said Barrington, becoming interested, 'of what do you think when you are roaming by yourself through the forest?'

'I make pictures in my mind,' said Angela, 'and sometimes when I am sitting by the river, the running water talks to me.'

'I should like to know what it says, if you will tell me.'

'There are spirits everywhere,' said Angela, solemnly; 'I have read it in an old book of Father's, and my soul tells me that it must be true. None but poets and young girls ever hear their voices. It is they who send inspiring thoughts and beautiful dreams. They are invisible except to the imagination, and their gentle murmurings can only be heard by the soul. They lift one up on wings—that is the real life, and the world below is only a

picture. I chatter too much,' she added, pausing abruptly. 'If you think me foolish you must remember that no one ever encourages me to talk, and you asked me to tell you my fancies.'

'I like to hear them,' replied Barrington. 'Do not hesitate to tell me your thoughts freely. You remind me of a sister whom I loved dearly, and whose temperament was of the same quaint, poetic type as your own.'

'And she died,' said Angela, looking at him earnestly, with her hand upon the garden-gate.

'She died at fifteen.'

'A little younger than I am,' murmured Angela, thoughtfully—'only a little younger.'

She opened the gate, and without speaking further led Barrington into Mrs. Ferris's parlour. It was a homely, pretty room, shaded by a screen of grape-leaves from the western sun, with windows opening towards the east, and the walls hung profusely with

drawings in chalk and water-colours. The spotless boards were covered with rugs of opossum-skins; the chintz covers and muslin curtains were without speck; upon the side-board were placed several pieces of plate, upon the brilliancy of which Mrs. Ferris prided herself.

The old lady, in her ample gown and white cap, sat at one side of the fireplace with a basket of undarned hose before her. Little Janie, perched upon a stool by her side, nursed a lapful of kittens, and gave utterance to remarks savouring somewhat of heterodoxy upon a Biblical lesson which Mrs. Ferris had been giving her.

'Aunt Pen, if God said that somebody was to kill Jesus, Judas wasn't so wicked after all for letting the Jews do it; for if he hadn't, we'd all have gone to hell.'

'Polly, Polly, mind your manners!' screeched a parrot in a cage by the window, as Angela and Barrington entered.

'Where is father?' asked the former.

'In the office settling with the fencers,' replied Mrs. Ferris; and Barrington, seeing that Angela was departing, introduced himself.

'Dear heart!' said Mrs. Ferris, 'I'm afraid that you have come over at an unlucky time. There's no one at Kooralbyn but ourselves. Miss Longleat went to Leichardt's Town a few days ago, and the Premier is always away at this season. However, Mr. Barrington,' she added warmly, 'I am more than pleased to see you. You'll cheer up the heart of my old man, for he was just full of you when he came back from meeting you at Kooya. I don't pretend to understand geniuses, but he'll talk to you by the hour about art and books, and if you're fond of the subject you couldn't go to anyone better up in it than Anthony Ferris.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Ferris entered with his daughter, and welcomed his guest

with an old-world pomposity, in which was a savour of deprecation. The *ménage* was curious, and struck Barrington as utterly unlike any other he had seen in Australia. There was in it an odd blending of æstheticism and eccentricity, and Mrs. Ferris seemed the only commonplace element in the party. Angela's innocent garrulity appeared to have suffered a sudden check; in the presence of her stepmother she hardly spoke, but retired to a corner with her book, above which she furtively regarded Barrington.

At dusk, after a little preliminary flutter on the part of the hostess, they dined. The day had been very hot, but now a breeze stirred the vine-leaves, which cast moving shadows upon the white board. It was like a scene out of a pastoral idyl. Upon the table was a freshly-gathered dessert, and the cheer, though modest, attested the excellence of Mrs. Ferris's housekeeping.

The old man produced a bottle of his

master's wine; his little dark eyes twinkled, and he stroked his grizzled beard with an air of self-complacency. Barrington had an appreciation for the picturesque, and this mixture of flourish and simplicity attracted him; his palate was gratified, and he had never felt more interested.

'To-morrow you must see Angela's studio,' said Mr. Ferris, as after dinner they sat smoking in the verandah. 'I am convinced that you will be astonished at the talent which her drawings exhibit. She is a strange child,' he continued sadly; 'poetic to a remarkable degree, reserved with her own family, and apparently unimpressionable, but clinging to the few whom she loves with an extraordinary tenacity of affection. Hers is the true artistic temperament, stirred only by the breath of sympathy. In many respects her disposition resembles mine. I pray heaven that her life may not, like mine, be embittered by disappointment and inapprecia-

tion. But I have few fears; if she lives she will become great.'

The moon was shining brightly, and Angela, in a white dress with a fantastic wreath of flowers adorning her yellow hair, seemed like a spirit of the night as she glided rather than walked in and out among the shrubs in the garden. Mrs. Ferris had withdrawn to put Janie to bed, and when a gentle snore announced that the old man had fallen asleep, Barrington quietly rose and joined the girl, who was now swinging herself to and fro in a hammock slung beneath an orange-tree.

'Is that the lagoon yonder?' asked Barrington, pointing to a shining expanse below them. 'Can we reach it from here?'

'It is at the foot of the garden,' replied the girl. 'There's a boat upon it; would you like to come out for a row?'

'I should be delighted,' he rejoined.

She sprang to the ground, and holding out

her hand with a childlike gesture, led him to the bank of the lake, where a rudely-fashioned canoe was moored. She unloosed the rope and stepped in, motioning him to the seat at the stern. Then she pushed off into the middle of the lagoon, and let the boat drift while she gathered a handful of the lotus-lilies that floated on the surface of the water.

'Listen!' said Angela, presently; 'there's music in the air to-night. Do you hear it?'

She watched him anxiously, as, wishing to humour her, he replied in the affirmative. His sympathy was the 'Open Sesame' to the world of her fanciful imagination; and indeed there was above and around that faint, sweet murmuring which is the melody of a summer evening.

'The spirits are all dancing to-night,' continued Angela, looking at him with her dreamy eyes and speaking with grave simplicity. 'They always do when the moon is at its full. There's a clear place beneath a

big cedar-tree by the creek, and that is their ball-room. This afternoon I brushed the twigs and fallen leaves away from the grass, so that it might be smooth and clean. All the fairies meet together, and they have a famous revel. No one knows these secrets but I.'

'And where do you learn them, Angela?'

'Now that is what puzzles me,' said the child, with a perplexed look. 'Is it when I am sleeping or waking? I do not know. It often seems to me that this is not my real home; that my true self belongs to that spirit-world which is hidden in all the common things that surround our daily lives. That world has a language of its own which is audible in the strains of nature's music. Some are deaf and do not hear it; others hear it but do not understand. I know—I feel—and when my stepmother says, "Poor Angel! she is only a foolish child!" I tell myself that I am wiser than she is, and that mysteries are

revealed to me which are hidden from her; but I do not speak to Mrs. Ferris or Honoria of what is in my mind. I am silent upon these matters, which have only to do with myself.'

Angela took up the oars and began to row again, singing dreamily to herself in fantastic harmonies, which Barrington guessed to be of her own composition. She had a sweet voice, pure and sympathetic, and, when raised, of considerable compass. Barrington leaned back in the boat, experiencing that nerve-vibration which is peculiar to temperaments of febrile excitability. The boundless expanse of shadowy solitude, the stillness of the night, the gliding motion of the boat, and the unearthly beauty of his companion, acted upon his imagination like the fumes of opium, and he felt that he was, for the hour at least, in an Eastern paradise.

Suddenly Angela ceased singing, and rested on her oars.

'I am so tired,' she said in her pathetic, childlike voice. 'I get so easily tired. Let us drift; and do you talk now. I want to listen. It is very pleasant gliding through the water like this. We will come here every night. You won't go away soon? Say that you will not go away.'

'My pretty child,' said Barrington, 'I will not talk of departure to-night. When the time comes it will be difficult to resist the charm of your sweet voice if you bid me stay.'

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE LAGOON.

UPON the following morning, at Barrington's request, Angela led the way to her studio. It was a room in one of the outbuildings originally used for garnering corn, and adjoined the store and accountant's office, which constituted Mr. Ferris's peculiar domain.

The door was padlocked, and only Angela and her father possessed the keys. The window overlooked a secluded part of the garden, where roses grew in rank luxuriance and scented verbena filled the air with perfume. By an ingenious contrivance Mr.

Ferris had arranged that the light should fall from above, and had caused the glass skylight to be protected from the violent hailstorms which raged among the mountains, by slanting sheets of zinc, that softened the glare without obscuring the light.

A little book-shelf surmounted a pine cupboard in one corner, but the rest of the room was lined with pictures of all kinds, in various stages of development—sketches of grass and reeds; of sunrise and sunset upon the mountains; of moonlight shimmering on the lagoon; dull anatomical studies and graceful portrayals of shadowy forms, rising from the mist or blending with the clouds. In every conception there were touches of mystery and sadness, of high effort and divine desire, which, though often imperfectly executed, were full of poetic originality. The true artistic soul revealed itself in every stroke of her pencil. Her landscapes were characterised by a delicate sentiment that lifted nature to the pitch of

idealism; her studies of the human face and form were types of spiritual beauty, with indeed the exception of a roughly-sketched portrait of a woman which at once attracted Barrington's attention.

'Who is this?' he asked eagerly, while Angela stood anxiously awaiting his comments upon her more ambitious works.

'It is Honoria Longleat,' said Angela, coldly.

'This — this Miss Longleat!' repeated Barrington, unprepared for beauty of so high an order.

He stood for a few moments in rapt contemplation of the drawing.

'Kooralbyn is a favoured place,' he murmured.

Angela turned away, her face wearing an expression of childlike pain.

'What is the matter, little one?' asked Barrington, seeing that she did not speak.

'You think only of *her*,' muttered Angela.

Barrington took her hand in his, and ranging the walls with his eyes, gave her pictures the calm inspection of a connoisseur.

'Accept my apologies for doubting you,' he said. 'You *have* genius.'

Angela's eyes sparkled with delight, and she suddenly raised a cloth which covered the painting upon her easel—a sunset study of plain and mountain.

'What do you think of the picture?' asked Mr. Ferris, entering. 'There is scope for the imagination in this conception. A little softening of that distance, Angela. A touch of mystery in the shadows of yonder valley. You have work here yet, my child.'

Barrington criticised and admired freely, but presently his eyes wandered to the portrait of Honoria. The old man observed his preoccupation, and frowned.

'Pah!' he cried in his excitable manner, 'it is ever so; while men have human in-

stincts, the glory of art must shrink into nothingness before the potency of flesh and blood. Popular taste would prefer the portrait of a wanton to the fairest incarnation of poesy. But it is to enrich the future and not the present that the artist toils. My Angela, thy frail frame enfolds a divine mission.'

'You are right,' said Barrington. 'Here is no ordinary talent. Surely you will not delay in taking her to Italy. It would be a sin to posterity were she debarred from studying art in its highest phases.'

'My friend,' said Anthony Ferris, solemnly. 'I have carefully planned Angela's future. In forbidding that she should be coerced; in permitting her to roam about the bush as she would, and in giving free play to her fantastic imagination, I have merely followed out my theory of artistic education. The truest artist is he whose aspiration springs direct from the heavenly fount. To produce great work, he must from infancy have become

familiarised with Nature in all her moods, untrammelled by conventional rules, and at liberty to send forth shoots of fancy according to the natural bent of his mind. There is time, later on, to study the old masters—who, after all, were but interpreters—the world of cities, the drama of society. I have had a motive in confining Angela's sympathies within the circle of these mountains. She must have become an artist before the petty interests of womanhood drag down her soul.'

As her father spoke Angela's gaze turned involuntarily towards Barrington, and the two pairs of eyes met. A deep blush overspread the girl's face, and seemed to reveal the dawn of an agitating consciousness. Mr. Ferris left the studio, called away by a group of station-hands who waited without. Approaching Angela, Barrington laid one hand upon her trembling fingers, and with the other pointed to the unfinished picture.

'You will never be a great artist, Angela,'

he whispered, 'till you have learned to feel like a woman.'

* * * * *

It will have been remarked that to Hardress Barrington's temperament feminine sympathy formed an essential component of happiness. That the woman by whom it was bestowed should be beautiful and interesting followed as a matter of course. That, like Angela, she should also be original and poetic, was more than his short experience of Australian society had permitted him to hope. The young girl was to him a never-ending source of speculation; her dreamy fancies and visionary talk, which seemed to verge so closely upon frenzy; her undoubted genius; the frank abandon of her manner to him, compared with her reserve to others; her beauty, and the quaint simplicity of her life and surroundings, puzzled and attracted him. He watched her with admiration in which was no deeper feeling, and listened to her with pleasure.

Her graceful companionship appeared to him like the perfume of a wild flower pervading a picturesque solitude. She seemed a true incarnation of the spirit of these Australian wilds, which, had they been invested with European romance, would have left his sensuous æstheticism nothing to desire. Till now, these free pastures and grand mountains had, to his fancy, resembled a perfectly-moulded form, destitute of the soul which brings animal beauty into harmony with human yearnings. With Angela's society the softening and poetic element, which he had so sorely missed during the last few months, was imported into his life.

Barrington's nature was one readily impressed, but slowly moved.

His passions had been so often stimulated to feverish activity that the calm vigour of healthy affection was a state of moral being that it would have been difficult to induce; yet there were in his heart certain pure

fraternal aspirations to which Angela's frank sensibility and innocent partiality appealed strongly.

For the first time since his arrival in Australia, he ceased to experience a nauseating discontent, and was in no haste to exchange the harmonious influences of Kooralbyn for the uncongenial atmosphere of Dyraaba.

He was Angela's constant companion in her walks and rides: he hung over her while she worked in her studio; he talked to her of Rome and Paris, of music, art, and literature, making her the confidante of his vague dissatisfaction with his lot, till she began to look upon him as a hero who had suffered cruel treatment at the world's hands.

He encouraged her fantastic prattle; he read aloud to her as they sat together by the banks of the river, or drifted in the canoe upon the lagoon. In all this tender *camaraderie* there was to her a bewildering charm.

She lay down to sleep with a smile upon her lips, and awoke with a nameless sense of joy.

Unconsciously, both to her and to himself —for unworthy motives must not be imputed to him—he was unveiling the budding beauty of her womanhood, and transporting her to an imaginary Arcadia where each step taken in uncertainty is fraught with peril, where the eyes are deceived by a false glamour, the pulses quicken and reason becomes mute; the ground yields unreal flowers of sentiment, and the air distils an essence subtle and intoxicating, while, alas! the lovely landscape, appearing in the distance, fades upon approach to the falsity of mirage.

One night, when Barrington had been about ten days at Kooralbyn, he and Angela were as usual out of doors, and had strolled to the edge of the lagoon. Mr. Ferris had the day before been unexpectedly summoned to a neighbouring station upon business, and Mrs. Ferris within was calmly dozing over

her book. It was a balmy, voluptuous evening, the moon was rising behind the Koorong Crag, and a faint breeze stirred the petals of the lilies, and lifted Angela's hair.

The girl was in a state of fitful excitability, alternately voluble and silent, while her vacant, rippling laugh echoed over plain and water, and startled Barrington by its shrill joyousness.

She had taken the oars and had rowed into the middle of the lagoon, where they had idly drifted among the lilies. Suddenly she half rose, and made the canoe whirl round and round in fantastic circles, till, alarmed for their safety, he begged her to desist.

'Take care,' he said; 'you will upset the boat.'

'And what then?' she cried.

'We should both fall into the water, and I should have to swim with you to the shore; or perhaps our feet might get entangled in the weeds, and we should sink.'

'That would not matter,' replied Angela, quite gravely. 'The water-spirits would not let me drown.'

'Are you not afraid of the Bunyip, then? Cobra Ball says that he inhabits this pool.'

'He is a bogie,' said Angela. 'And nothing wicked belongs to the spirit-world.'

She recommenced her antics, and playfully threw a few drops of water in his face.

'Mischievous elf!' exclaimed Barrington, seizing her hands.

There ensued a mock struggle, in which he tried to wrest the oars from her grasp. Her pretty face, perilously near his own, offered a temptation too great to be resisted. He wound his arm round her lithe form, and kissed her lips.

Angela let the oars drop, and one of them floated away among the lilies. He felt that she trembled, and frightened at what he had done, released her. She leaned back in the boat, and covered her face with her wet hands.

'Naughty child!' he said, 'why did you provoke me to conquer you?'

He drew away the fingers which hid her eyes. All her mirth and mischief had vanished, and she looked at him with an expression of wonder and beseeching that stirred his heart with a painful emotion.

'Angela,' he said, more gravely. 'I will not kiss you again, but let us make a compact with one another. I will be your elder brother, and you shall be my sweet little sister, whom I will love dearly, and who must promise to obey me when I bid her do that which is for her good. Now, you must take my seat, and I will row you to the shore. You are pale and trembling. You have over-tired yourself in your excitement. See, you have splashed yourself, too; your thin gown is quite wet, and if you remain longer on the water you will take cold.'

He passed his hand caressingly over her chest, covered only by her muslin bodice,

which was damp with spray and dew. Angela mutely answered his appeal by bending suddenly forward and with innocent fervour pressing her lips to his hand.

He relieved their mutual embarrassment by seeking the oar which had slipped away from her hold, and then rowed her to the bank.

CHAPTER XIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

IT was announced that the Parliament of Leichardt's Land would re-open upon the 3rd of March, and Miss Longleat's departure from Kooralbyn had been originally fixed for the 1st; but, as has been seen, she had abruptly changed her plans, and had commanded Mr. Ferris's escort to town a few days prior to Barrington's arrival on the station. Had she been aware of his intended visit, it is probable that she would have lingered in order to make his acquaintance. The prospect of a new excitement would have held forth con-

siderable attraction for her at that moment.

Since her interview with Dyson Maddox, Honoria had felt restless and unhappy. It was certain that she had rejected him. Yet it seemed by no means equally certain that she did not love him, for no sooner had she apparently convinced herself of indifference, than his image would persistently obtrude itself as the secondary figure in sundry melodramatic situations of which fancy painted her the heroine. Poor Honoria! Imagination presented an uncircumscribed field of action, involving every condition of being save that of passive enjoyment. Love, fear, hate, drawing-room comedy and harrowing tragedy were all comprised in her repertoire; but the puzzling consideration which interfered with her clear foreshadowing lay in the fact that not one of the unconscious performers who played with her upon the stage of real life, answered to the pitch of

emotional energy demanded by her own high-strung temperament. A Rachel, surrounded by tenth-rate provincial tragedians, could hardly have felt more at a loss than did Honoria, whose lovers, with the solitary exception of Dyson Maddox, inspired a temporary excite-men followed by a sickening reaction.

The day before she left Kooralbyn Honoria received the following letter from Maddox:

'The Club, Leichardt's Town,

'*February 21st.*

'My dear Miss Longleat,

'Forgive me for leaving you so abruptly the other day. You will understand better than I can explain what my feelings at the time must have been. I have thought much of what you said to me, and thank you for your frankness; it has convinced me alike of your goodwill and your coldness. Let me say one word upon that

subject, which may henceforth be considered closed. It is my earnest wish that you may love deeply some more fortunate man than myself, and that thus the rich colouring which your life lacks now may be brought into it, and make you content. For myself, I am strong enough to stand on one side and watch the course of events. It is possible that there may be hope for me in the future, but I will not suffer myself to dwell upon so sweet a dream, and it is my wish to cultivate indifference. You will hear from your father that I have accepted the appointment of Minister for Lands. I hope that I may have acted wisely for the support of our party. My new duties will prevent me from calling frequently at the Bunyas, nor, under the present circumstances, should I wish to see you often; but I beg that you will consider Araby at your disposal if you have no riding-horses in town at present. Pardon the suggestion, but I think that, for your father's sake, it

would be well if you were in Leichardt's Town; he is lonely without a companion.

'Ever faithfully yours,

'DYSON MADDOX.'

Honoria read the letter several times, and turned it over to see if there were a line or a postscript that she had overlooked; but there was nothing to remove the impression of abandonment which the cold, guarded sentences left on her mind. She was one of those women to whom a possession becomes sweet in proportion as its attractions are enhanced by the doubtful charm of uncertainty. Now that Maddox had apparently reconciled himself to her dismissal, she felt a strong desire to recall him. She even composed the opening words of a reply to his letter: 'Why should the subject be closed? You have not understood me as I wished.' . . . . Then her cheeks flamed, and she tossed her head. Of course such words could not be written; and did she

not know that if she were mad enough to send them, she would regret them an hour afterwards? No, let him go! This pale, sisterly attachment was not the love of which she had dreamed.

The last words of his note appeared to carry a veiled meaning to which she had no clue. She was in entire ignorance of the incipient flirtation with Mrs. Vallancy—to which, in fact, Dyson had alluded—and was at a loss to understand Mr. Ferris's malign chuckle when she announced that upon her father's account she wished to go to town.

'I assure you that there is no occasion to disturb yourself,' he said, in a sneering tone. 'Your father has found society which will, I am sure, amply replace your own.'

'What does he mean?' asked Honoria of Mrs. Ferris, when the old man had left the room.

'Oh, my love,' replied Aunt Pen, 'it's that gossip Dungie who has been talking. He picks

up and circulates all the scandal in Kooya. The Premier is but a man, and there are brazen hussies all the world over. But you need not be afraid of a step-mother; Mrs. Vallancy has got a husband, though they say that he's not any better than he should be, either.'

Honoria elevated her eyebrows contemptuously, too proud to pursue the subject; nevertheless, she held to her determination of joining her father immediately. The mail-man had passed by, so that there was no mode of informing Mr. Longleat of the change in her plans. Embracing the idea of a surprise, she made a two days' journey from Kooralbyn, travelling by steamer from Kooya, and arriving in Leichardt's Town about five o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr. Ferris hailed a cab at the wharf, and escorted her to the Bunyas. Honoria's spirits revived at the sight of the bustle around her, and she was pleased with the

appearance of the house. The oleanders in front were still in bloom, and the verandah was adorned with stands of choice ferns and calladiums. The maid who opened the door looked surprised to see her mistress, and upon being questioned said that she believed Mr. Longleat was in the garden.

'Probably you have business in town,' said Honoria haughtily, dismissing her escort. 'We shall see you at dinner, I suppose?'

Mr. Ferris refused the curt invitation, and departed to an hotel, where he might at least alleviate his sense of mortification by brandy and soda-water. Honoria entered the drawing-room, threw off her hat and gloves, and ordered tea, with a lurking hope that chance might lead Dyson Maddox thither that afternoon.

The room had a look of late occupation. It was large and tastefully furnished, extending the width of the house, and facing at the back a trim lawn and shrubbery, shaded by

a row of bamboos which separated the Premier's grounds from the Botanical Gardens. Honoria turned over the books upon the table, and with a view to her winter's campaign, began planning a new arrangement of the furniture. But this was dull work unaided, and she walked out into the garden to search for her father. The recollection of Mr. Ferris's insinuations gave bent to her suspicions; nevertheless, it occasioned a disagreeable shock to her nerves to discover Mr. Longleat seated on a bench in one of the shadiest alleys of the shrubbery, side by side with a lady whom she instantly recognised as Mrs. Vallancy. No suggestion is more repellent to a young girl's maidenly instinct than that of an equivocal love affair on the part of her father. Mrs. Vallancy and Mr. Longleat were sitting very close together, and one slender, black-gloved hand rested confidingly upon the Premier's white linen coat-sleeve. The expression of his face, as it was

bent in profile over his companion, sent a qualm of disgust and repugnance through Honoria's mind. A fierce jealousy seized her frame and stiffened it to the coldness of ice. She erected her crest and straitened her gait as she walked majestically across the lawn.

'Papa,' she said, in silvery, neutral tones, when she had reached within a few paces of where they sat—'Papa.'

Mrs. Vallancy was a woman whose emotions were under strict control, and beyond a slight suffusion of colour she showed no embarrassment. Mr. Longleat grew very red, and looked annoyed.

'I am afraid that I have startled you,' said Honoria, with an enunciation which contempt and anger rendered very distinct. 'I have just arrived. I made up my mind to leave Kooralbyn a few days sooner than I had at first intended, and I knew that the house would be ready. I hope that you are glad to see me, papa.'

'I am always glad to see you, my dear,' replied Longleat, recovering his composure, and ashamed of himself for having felt guilty. 'Mrs. Vallancy, I think you know my daughter.' The two ladies, who were slightly acquainted, shook hands. 'Always independent-like, and taking your own way—eh, Honie?' he added, with an awkward attempt at familiarity. 'It isn't every young woman as 'ud have the liberty to come to town when she chose. Are you quite well, my girl?' he said, scrutinising her face with anxious pride. 'Somehow you seem to me as though you weren't quite up to the mark.'

'I am very well, papa,' replied Honoria, in a chilling tone; 'only a little tired with my journey. I have ordered tea. Perhaps you will come into the drawing-room and have some,' she added, turning to Mrs. Vallancy.

'I ought to be going home,' said the latter, in her appealing way. 'Your father is so kind; I was walking in the Botanical

Gardens, and he met me and persuaded me to come in and see his roses. I have been asking him to explain the great political question, and he is so good as to be interested in my partisanship, though my husband is a renegade. You must not judge either of us too harshly, Miss Longleat. It is a delightful surprise, seeing you. You are down for the winter, I suppose ?'

'That depends upon the progress of affairs,' replied Honoria. 'If the Ministry is ousted we shall probably retire to the obscurity of Kooralbyn. I left Janie with Mrs. Ferris,' she added, turning to her father. 'I thought it wiser to do so, in case of our beating a sudden retreat.'

Her effort at hilarity was caused by the appearance of Maddox in the verandah. He had called to see the Premier, and did not become aware of Honoria's presence till he had crossed the lawn.

He bowed gravely to Mrs. Vallancy, shook

hands with Miss Longleat, and nodded to his colleague.

For the first time in his society an uncomfortable shyness took possession of Honoria. She hurriedly proposed that they should go within doors, and when they were in the drawing-room poured out the tea, handed cream and sugar and fruit, and talked volubly, with a little caustic flavouring to her speech, which puzzled Mrs. Vallancy, and afforded Honoria herself the zest of dramatising.

Presently Mrs. Vallancy rose, and Mr. Longleat offered to accompany her to the ferry; thus Dyson and Honoria were left alone.

'What is that woman doing here?' she asked, turning fiercely upon him, as though he were responsible for Mrs. Vallancy's presence.

'I am sorry to see that she and your father have become friends,' he answered quietly.

'You know some evil of her?' continued Honoria.

'She is in an unfortunate position; her husband is a brute, and treats her unkindly. She has the reputation of being a coquette. Men speak lightly of her, and she is avoided by nice-minded women. That is sufficient reason why you should not be allowed to drift into an intimacy with her.'

'You need not fear that I shall ever be friendly with her. I detest those eyes, at once shallow and deep, and that air of injured innocence, which is only a mask to attract pity and admiration. A woman can always read a woman. She is false to the core. I had rather be a murderess than a hypocrite to my real self. It was on her account, then—on my father's—that you advised me to come down. I am not afraid, but thank you—that was like you. I did did not know you in your letter; it was so cold, so—— It would grieve me deeply if you ceased to—to be interested in me.'

'I can never cease to be interested in you,' said Maddox; 'but it is wiser for me that I should shun you. I think that I understand you better than you do yourself,' he added, with bitterness; 'you would like me to become your lapdog again; you want me to be your slave, but you reject me as your lover. I cannot submit to the one position; I will not strive for the other. A man who tries to force the affection of a woman is contemptible. Perhaps, after all, fidelity is an overrated virtue. I want to cure myself. If you have the nobility which I fancy you possess, you will help me—or you will own that you love me, and put me out of my suspense.'

Honoria sat still, with her eyes upon the ground; then suddenly she looked up and caught his gaze. It's very ardour quenched her dawning affection; and his appearance was rough, his coat ill-made, and by reason of his useless arm, put on awry. Involuntarily she shook her head; her thoughts were

reflected in her face, and he read them plainly enough.

'I am not polished enough for you,' he said. 'No; that is true; I am not of the kind from which you will choose your husband. Good-bye, Honoria,' he said in a husky voice. 'Look to me if you need a friend, but do not expect that I shall be an acquaintance. I came thinking that your father would be alone to talk over a political matter, but it is of no great consequence, and I will not wait. Perhaps you will kindly tell him that I will call at the Treasury before the meeting of the Executive to-morrow.'

Honoria uttered a faint assent, and he left her.

When she was alone, she threw herself upon the sofa and burst into an hysterical fit of weeping.

Mr. Longleat, entering a short time later, found her sitting in a dejected attitude by the window. She had not heard him return, and

he was able to perceive the traces of tears upon her cheeks.

His heart yearned towards her, and yet he scarcely knew how to accost her—this delicate piece of human mechanism which was his own, but not of him, of which he was so proud, yet hardly dared to touch. He went up behind her and laid his large rough hand awkwardly upon her shoulder. She shrank, and turned her face away.

'Honie, my girl,' said Longleat, 'I thought you looked out of sorts, as though you had been crying-like——'

Honoria twitched her body petulantly, and his hand fell.

'I am quite well,' she answered; 'a little tired—that's all.'

'You did not use to be tired with a journey from Kooralbyn,' continued Longleat, wounded yet persistent. 'There's something troubling you, my dear. It's not your way, I know, to speak of what is in your

mind. You are one of the proud, reserved sort, as I've liked you to be. A girl like you should keep her dignity, and not let those that are beneath her into her confidence. But I'd be sore indeed if you kept a grief from me. What's nearer than father and daughter? And we're that to each other; nothing can alter it. I think it might be better for us both if we talked more openly to one another; it 'ud be better for me. A man needs sympathy sometimes. I've got a queer feeling on me. I'm a bit of a fatalist. Something that's written up above is going to happen, and I want to keep hold on you! It seems as if—for all you've been to me—we had never been companions like; there hasn't been that confidence between us that I'd have wished. Let us stick together, Honie. Let us try to cotton with each other.'

At any other time the appeal would have touched a responsive chord, but the distaste-

ful thought of his friendship for Mrs. Vallancy produced a feeling of revulsion, and Honoria's dissatisfaction made her ungracious.

'I have always told you everything of importance to us both,' she said perversely, 'and there is nothing on my mind now. And you have got friends. There's Mrs. Vallancy. I did not expect to find her here today. I am told that you are very intimate with her.'

'Yes, I have got to know her,' replied Mr. Longleat, deliberately. 'I have got to like her. Ladies are not much in my line, but she understands me. She is soft and clever and winning, and she is not too fine to talk to a rough old man like me. And I am sorry for her. She is unhappily married. She has got a hard life, poor thing! I—I'd be glad, Honoria, if you would make friends with her, and ask her to come and see you sometimes.'

Honoria's eyes flashed in wrath.

'Mrs. Vallancy will appreciate your consolation more than she will mine,' answered the girl with a jarring laugh. 'No, I cannot be her friend. She is not a woman whom I could ever like or respect. Papa, you will not force her companionship upon me.'

'I see; women are as hard as the devil to each other,' said Longleat, bitterly. 'I'll not force anyone upon you whom you dislike; but I shall make friends with whom I please.'

He moved away from his daughter with the feeling that they had taken opposite sides, and that it behoved him to defend his own. The request which he had made had been prompted by a hardly defined instinct of right. By placing Mrs. Vallancy beneath the ægis of his daughter's friendship, he hoped to secure himself against the possibility of dishonourable intent.

Honoria's unexpected arrival in Leichardt's

Town had caused a reaction from his late unwholesome excitement. As he had walked home from the ferry he had almost succeeded in convincing himself that his attraction towards Mrs. Vallancy had arisen from a natural longing for feminine sympathy, and that having found this in the society of his daughter, he must of necessity attach less significance to the emotion which those half-stolen interviews in Mrs. Vallancy's dim drawing-room had produced in his frame.

Yet in his moments of deepest infatuation, he had not admitted the existence of guilty feeling. A man drifting towards passionate admiration of a married woman, does not readily own to an unlawful attraction. It takes the name of friendship, pity, congeniality of taste—anything but love.

'I'll do as I please,' he repeated. 'I've a right to choose my own friends, and if they don't suit you, Honie, we must keep apart. You have been educated different to me, and

we don't think alike. I am not complaining of that; it is what I meant all along. My heart has been so set on your being a lady that I would not have had you like myself. That has been my pride. I hated the aristocrats. I hated their caste prejudices; their laws made for the rich and not for the poor; their cant and hypocrisy; their snivelling contempt for honest, independent men. I wanted to show them that my daughter—the daughter of a bullock-driver—could be as delicate and fine as their own. It might have been happier for me if I had let you grow up rough, like Maggie Lamb; but whether or no, I would not change you. There's plenty of money; spend it and make yourself happy. Buy as many gowns and trinkets as you like, and hold up your head so that everyone shall envy you. As I said before, there hasn't been much companionship between us, and perhaps it was not to be expected. It has come upon me lately, this feeling of loneli-

ness. There's not much satisfaction, after all, in riches and power.'

'Papa,' said Honoria, in a choked voice, 'I would have been more to you if I could. You have not brought me up to take a deep interest in your occupations, or to understand your thoughts.'

'That's where it is: I wanted to make a lady of you; I wanted the whole of Leichardt's Land to say, "There's Thomas Longleat's daughter—fit to be a duchess." I have kept you apart from me on purpose. I have done it for your good and for my pleasure, and I'm not grumbling at my own work. There has always been love between us, Honoria—I'm certain of that—but where there's no confidence, love is apt to die out. It would cut me to the heart if you were to grow ashamed of my rough ways, or to go agen me——'

'Papa,' cried Honoria, 'you speak very strangely. I don't want to go against you;

I am very grateful for all that you have done for me. You know that I am most anxious for your political success. I have wished to make you happy.'

'Ay, ay! I am not complaining of you,' said Longleat; 'I only said that I felt lonely-like. . . . . You shook my hand off your shoulder just now. . . . If things came out agen me you would not take my rough old head and lay it there, where you could not abear my hand to rest. . . . You are a fair-weather child, and I have reared you so. It's all success that tells with you. . . . . I have got a queer longing on me. A man needs more in life than only to be proud of his own. Perhaps if Janie's mother had lived I should not have felt so. She would ha' made it up to me.'

'You never mention your first wife,' said Honoria, in a stifled way. Her filial sentiment was not great; she did not remember her mother, and had a vague notion that it

was better not to talk of her. Yet in some inexplicable way she resented the slight to her memory implied by Longleat's frequent allusions to her successor.

Longleat reddened consciously.

'Poor Sarah!' he muttered; 'I married her at the diggings. She wasn't my sort; she had fine ways. She had some education —she was a London girl—she— There, do not talk of her. . . . You never knew her— you had best let her alone——'

'At any rate I am her daughter,' said Honoria. 'You do me an injustice,' she added hysterically, and left the room, her eyes swimming in tears.

'Honie, Honie!' Longleat called after her despairingly; but she did not return. She had her cry out in her own chamber, then stiffened herself with an air of reserve; so that when she sat down to dinner with her father she met his tentative advances with cold incomprehension, and discussed the political

prospects with as much calm interest as though no tender spot had been touched in her heart.

The Premier was in an excited mood. Contrary to his usual custom, he drank several glasses of wine rapidly one after the other, scarcely eating, but talking volubly.

'The townspeople are shouting that the Government is in a bad way,' he said. 'Middleton and his party are chuckling in their sleeves; but he who laughs longest laughs most. The floods out west have kept five of our men from getting down. If they don't arrive in time, the Opposition will have a good chance of ousting us. But I mean fighting, and if stone-walling tactics will tide me over, by George I'll use them!'

Honoria asked pointed questions which showed her appreciation of the situation; yet with all her interest was mingled a half-contempt for what she considered the pettiness of the object. What did it matter, after

all, whether Longleat or Middleton were in power?

'You don't seem to get the steam up,' said her father. 'You will be as excited as any of them when the House meets. Mind you, I am not saying that we shall not be beaten this time, but I'll let you into a secret. There's another shot in my locker; I have set my heart on coming out winner. The Premier of Leichardt's Lands is a big man in the colonies now, but he will be a bigger man yet before he has done.'

He rose from the table and shook his great shoulders.

'I feel hot and out of sorts,' he said; 'I think that I will take a stroll down towards the Gardens. You will be going early to bed. Perhaps I shall turn into the club and see if Dyson Maddox is there; I fancy that he wanted to talk to me this afternoon.'

Honoria delivered the message that Dyson had left.

'Were you surprised to hear that he was Minister for Lands?'

'No,' she replied. 'He is the most likely man you could have chosen. I think you have done wisely.'

'He has a good head upon his shoulders. The time may come when he will step into my shoes. Honoria, I had counted upon your being the Premier's wife. It has been a bitter disappointment to me that you have made up your mind agen him. Perhaps you'll think different by-and-by.'

'No,' she exclaimed defiantly; 'I shall never think differently.'

The Premier looked at her wistfully, and took up his hat.

'Good-night, my dear.'

He went out and walked down the street, his white linen clothes making him a conspicuous object in the half-light. It was one of Honoria's grievances that he did not as a rule change his apparel for dinner. She

watched him from the dining-room windows. As in her jealous misgivings she had thought probable, he passed the turning that led to the club, and went on towards the ferry, then was lost to sight beneath the shadow of the bamboos. The girl smiled grimly and uneasily. She was ashamed of the suspicion, yet was half ready to believe that he was on his way to visit Mrs. Vallancy, and had the miserable conviction that her power was failing her on all sides.

In truth, when he had left the Bunyas, Longleat had no fixed bent for his footsteps. They had turned unconsciously towards the river, and, as the boat was lying at the ferry-steps, he got into it.

He was the only passenger, and the boatman Pettit was loquacious as usual.

'It were a bad thing for folks as could not walk steady to live at Emu Point. Vallancy had had a close shave of falling in not an hour since. Not but what a ducking had

been like to sober him; and Lord, how he swore at the Premier! *He* warn't agoin' to let him carry his railway. He'd be d——d if the Government stopped in a week after Parliament opened!'

Longleat boiled with indignation. He reflected upon a promise he had made the day before, and of a proposition which he meant to bring forward in the Cabinet on the morrow. Was this the creature for whom he was about to imperil his political reputation?

Then he pictured the drunken husband's return, his probable ill-treatment of the beautiful, injured wife. Longleat bethought him of her words: 'If only there were some place, ever so far north, to which he could be sent.'

Gundaroo presented obvious advantages.

The Premier loitered about the Point for half-an-hour or more, not daring to approach the Vallancys' cottage too closely, but keeping a keen watch upon the light which

flickered in the windows of the drawing-room. A friend met him, and cried :

'Hullo, Longleat! what brings you over here?'

Longleat stammered an incoherent remark upon the heat of the night and the pleasant breeze that always blew upon this side of the water, then, with a guilty feeling weighing upon him, retraced his steps.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COUP D'ÉTAT.

UPON the 3rd of March the Parliament of Leichardt's Land was formally reopened. The day was cloudless, and the city wore its most gala aspect. Flags waved everywhere; they floated from the gates leading to Government House, from the steamers at anchor in the river, from the shops in King Street, and the roof of the Assembly Chambers. By eleven o'clock a great crowd had collected before the entrance to the Legislative Buildings, and groaned or cheered as the various ministers, the Oppositionists, and officials walked in.

Upon each side of the steps the Volunteers were drawn up in line, the band played, and one by one, carriages drove up and deposited their occupants, mostly ladies in bright apparel, carrying gay parasols. There was a press forward as Lady Georgina Augmering, the Governor's wife, descended from her barouche, and was ushered with becoming formality to a seat upon the daïs.

She was a handsome, dark-haired old lady, with an artificial smile and gracious address, who always wore fine black lace and heavy silks and brilliant diamond rings, and who had a firm belief in her sacred mission as the feminine regenerator of colonial manners.

Shortly after her arrival the band struck up 'God save the Queen,' the cannons by the river-side boomed a salute, the cheering redoubled, and Governor Augmering, a short, rubicund individual, who liked his joke, was a *bon vivant*, and inspired no particular awe, and who upon this occasion was dressed in a

tight-buttoned blue uniform and a plumed hat, was met by the President, the officials, and the members, and duly conducted to his throne.

There ensued a little buzz, during which the ladies arranged their dresses and the Governor surveyed the scene below him. The chamber was long and lofty, with a gallery extending along its sides, and was furnished with carved, morocco-covered benches, and a massive table. Upon a raised crimson-carpeted daïs, at one end, sat his Excellency in state, flanked by the representatives of the naval and military elements in Leichardt's Land. A few steps below him was Lady Georgina, smiling blandly around; and on a level with her the Chief Justice and the President of the Council in their robes. Dyson Maddox, in his capacity of Minister of the Upper House, occupied a seat at the head of the peeresses' benches, filled with well-dressed ladies, among whom Miss Long-

leat and Mrs. Vallancy were notably conspicuous.

The Premier's daughter was all in white, and wore a bouquet of rare lilies at her bosom. Mrs. Vallancy, in black, with artistic touches of yellow here and there, and a Maréchal Niel rose pinned into the lace at her neck, cast rapid glances in the direction of the bar, where the members of the Lower House would presently appear.

The message was sent; the speech read; the Railway and Loan Bill commented upon; the policy of the Government expounded. Then the flutter recommenced; the Governor left the house; the ladies smiled and nodded; and the opening scene of the political drama was over. It was a farcical performance, but it involved important issues for the Premier and his party.

The four missing members, who represented the Government majority, had not arrived.

Miss Longleat was pale, and appeared agitated. A golden serpent which she wore coiled round her neck rose and fell with the undulations of her breath. She resolutely looked away from Dyson, who sat almost opposite her. Lady Georgina Augmering addressed her kindly, and held her hand in token of affectionate welcome. The Premier's daughter was a favourite with the viceregal party, but Mrs. Vallancy's timid bow met with a chill reception.

Mr. Middleton, the leader of the Opposition, a lean, wiry man, with a bleared eye and saturnine countenance, came up and shook hands with her. He looked disagreeably triumphant. Longleat appeared dogged and flushed; Mrs. Vallancy met his eye, and gave him a smile of understanding.

'He will accept,' she whispered breathlessly, when chance threw them for a moment together. 'Oh, how can I thank you?'

'There is no need to thank me,' he re-

turned in a low tone. 'I have done it for you.'

An interesting debate was expected. That afternoon Honoria took her place in the Ladies' Gallery of the Assembly Chamber. Mrs. Vallancy was there also, but the women did not speak to each other. Honoria was haughty and white from repressed excitement; Mrs. Vallancy looked nervous and elated.

Certain formal routine business was gone through, and an address of congratulation upon a recent felicitous Royal event was moved by a member of the Government, and after some sparring, which sufficiently betrayed the belligerent tendencies of the Opposition, finally carried. The answering address to the Governor's speech was brought forward by a bearded squatter, whose powers of oratory had been hitherto exercised in haranguing his shearers, and who, wandering in a circle round the central point of his

discourse, viz., that the late tin discoveries had been highly conducive to the prosperity of the colony, and that the time for railway extension had now arrived, and taking a generally optimist view of the position, announced that the proposals of the Government were in all respects satisfactory to the Legislative Assembly—(cries of 'No—no!' from the Opposition benches)—adding, that he had not the least doubt of the benefit which would accrue to the colony from the formation of a railway between Leichardt's Town and Kooya, and the opening up of easy communication——

'With the Premier's station,' sarcastically interrupted a member of the Opposition. Whereupon there was a call to order, upon which another member got upon his legs, and there ensued a wordy and irregular combat, in the course of which the member for East Warra Warra denounced the member for North Carramburra as an obstructive mono-

maniac, who had so bullied and browbeaten the Chairman of the Commission which had been called to inquire into the expediency of a railway, that the result of the Commission had been most unsatisfactory. In fact, the honourable member for North Carramburra had shown a dishonourable desire to *burke* the whole proceedings of the Commission.

The honourable member for North Carramburra, hotly :

'Mr. Speaker, is the term *burke* Parliamentary ?'

'It is the name of a man—a murderer,' rejoined an occupant of the cross-benches.

The member for North Carramburra :

'Mr. Speaker, I must state emphatically that what the honourable member for East Warra Warra alleges against me is a base fabrication.'

Further cries of order.

The Speaker expressed his opinion that it would be wise if honourable members would

avoid personal allusions, and that it might also be well to allow the honourable member to proceed, and to answer him afterwards.

Here was raised the question of privilege, and there ensued a somewhat disorderly expression of opinion on the part of the browbeaten member, which was sufficiently uninteresting to the gallery, but which was followed by a vigorous onslaught on the part of the leader of the Opposition, who moved as an amendment, 'That the proposals of the Government in connection with public works are eminently unsatisfactory to this House'—a motion tantamount to withdrawal of confidence.

The Government tactics consisted in talking against time: the young recruits skirmishing lightly, the great-guns reserving themselves for heavier work—in the hope that the laggard reinforcements might shortly appear, while the Opposition was eager to hurry matters to

a crisis, and provoke a division that must result in Ministerial defeat.

In the gallery, the wives of the Anti-Railwayist Faction were decorously triumphant: the ladies on the Government side looked crestfallen and mutually sympathetic; yet each hugged the comforting reflection that her lord might assist in a coalition Ministry. To Miss Longleat alone the defeat would be absolutely crushing.

She was sitting apart at the lower end of the gallery, while two Government clerks, upon the other side of the partition, were discussing the situation, unaware that their remarks reached her ear. Said one:

'It is likely that there will be an appeal to the country.'

'Very improbable,' returned the other. 'Longleat must put on considerable pressure to induce the Governor to sanction it. Old Augmering's time is nearly up, and he is in mortal terror of doing anything unconstitutional.'

'Longleat has the pluck of the devil,' was the reply. 'Whatever comes of the debate, I'll back him to win in the long-run. I can tell by the very expression of his face that he has a charge in reserve. Depend upon it, Parliament will be dissolved. Have you seen the evening's *Gazette?* This Gundaroo appointment will go against him. It looks like a bribe—yet the fellow is not worth buying. What can have induced him to give it to Vallancy?'

The other shrugged his shoulders.

'There's a woman at the bottom of it. It is convenient sometimes to get a husband out of the way.'

Presently Dyson Maddox, whose operations in the Council had been short, came in to hear the debate, and gained admittance to the Ladies' Gallery. He had watched Honoria's face with its expression of pained perplexity till he could not resist coming to her. It seemed to him that she had cast

upon him a look of dumb appeal, and he obeyed the summons and took his seat beside her.

'I hear,' she said hoarsely, that the police magistracy of Gundaroo has been given to Mr. Vallancy. Is it true?'

'It is in the evening's *Gazette*,' replied Dyson.

'Why have you allowed this?' cried Honoria, passionately. 'You are in the Ministry; surely you had a voice in the matter?'

'I am truly sorry,' replied Dyson. 'You must know that it was done in opposition to my wishes. Your father made it a personal question. But I ought not to discuss Cabinet matters, even with you.'

'The appointment will tell fearfully against you,' exclaimed Honoria.

'Undoubtedly. Middleton will handle it presently. We are prepared for unpleasant language.'

'Oh, I am sick of this!' cried Honoria. 'They say that he has done it for *her* sake. It is hateful — degrading. . . . I will go back to Kooralbyn,' she added suddenly. 'We shall be beaten; why should I stay? Papa said the other day that I was a fair-weather child; I will justify his opinion. He has forsaken me. Let him stay with Mrs. Vallancy. I will return to Janie. . . . . And now I am going home.'

Dyson was touched with deep pity for her evident despondency. His very compassion forced him to place a restraint upon his speech, and made him appear cold. He escorted her to the Bunyas, but refused her timidly-given invitation to enter. She ate her dinner alone; then returned to the House, and sat listening to the speeches till midnight.

The galleries were now fuller than ever. Opposite her the mob jostled each other; and the Speaker's ante-room was crowded

with gentlemen, who watched her eagerly as she took her place behind the railings, not so high but that her face could be plainly seen. Beneath her, at the head of the Ministerial bench, her father sat, his arms folded, his eyes downcast, his face sullen. Dyson was now sitting below the bar. The interest had become intense. There were no loungers strolling in from the smoking and refreshment rooms. The Sergeant-at-Arms looked more alert than usual. The Speaker leaned forward over his desk and listened excitedly. Yet the subject-matter of the debate was of no State importance.

The leader of the Opposition was still speaking. The Gundaroo appointment was commented upon in terms far from complimentary to the Premier. An undercurrent of disgraceful insinuation ran through the discussion. Honoria's cheeks burned, and Mrs. Vallancy was rigid, braving shame to avoid suspense. Longleat sat still, with a

look of dogged obstinacy upon his face, and did not raise his head till a direct charge was levelled against his honour, when he got up and fiercely denied the allegation against him.

There followed a copious interchange of personalities, and Honoria blushed deeper. Why did her father descend to such scurrility? This petty warfare was degrading him. There was about the Premier to-night none of that rugged eloquence and manly determination which had compelled her approval, even when she had winced at the misapplication of an aspirate.

Mr. Middleton stood with outstretched finger pointed towards the object of his attack, pouring forth a torrent of invective, which was enhanced in disagreeable reference by the gestures with which it was accompanied. He could descend to any vituperation which did not exceed the limits of Parliamentary language. There were cries

of 'Order, order,' but still the rush of eloquence suffered no check. He knew his adversary's weak point, and would not let his advantage slip. 'What had been the honourable member's meaning when he had declared upon the boards of that House that he had never given away a billet from personal or interested motives? How could he justify to his colleagues and his antagonists this perversion of his oft-vaunted political morality?' etc., etc.

At last Honoria felt that she could bear no more. She went home and dreamed miserably of defeat; but the debate continued all night, and grey morning crept in upon the combatants as they nodded upon their benches, or took it by turns to retire for rest and refreshment, always careful to preserve a quorum.

Except from her point of observation in the Ladies' Gallery, Honoria saw nothing of her father for the next three days. He fought

bravely when his turn came, shaking himself like a lion, and speaking till exhaustion compelled him to cease, even drawing one convert to the Government side by the rough oratory that seldom entirely failed its mark. But the Ministry was doomed.

Upon the third night the debate was brought to a conclusion. The House divided, sixteen to thirteen, and the Opposition carried the amendment by a majority of three.

It was confidently expected that the *Gazette* extraordinary would announce the resignation of the Ministry.

There were public meetings of both factions. A violent demonstration took place in the Premier's favour, and a counter-procession of Anti-Railwayists solemnly burned his effigy before his own windows. There were conferences of the Cabinet, and rushings to and fro between the public offices and Government House. A few days later the *Gazette*

announced 'That his Excellency the Governor, with the advice of his Executive Council, would be pleased to prorogue the Parliament of Leichardt's Land, now assembled, prior to its dissolution.'

A sudden blankness fell upon the capital. The late members rushed back to their constituencies to canvass for the new election; and Honoria, oppressed by a strange weariness and indifference, returned to Kooralbyn.

END OF VOL. I.

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